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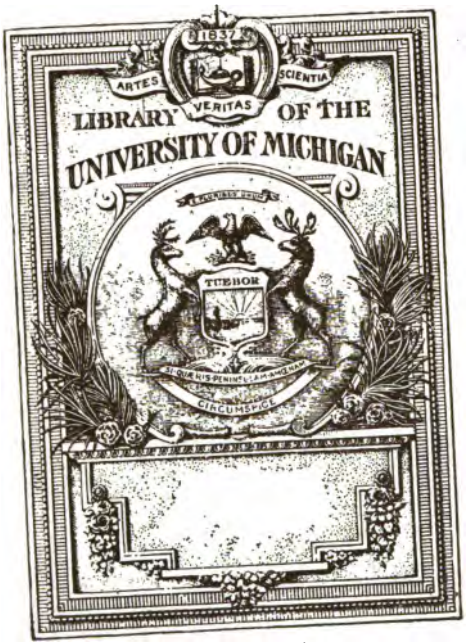
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MASOLLAM

MASOLLAM;

A PROBLEM OF THE PERIOD.

A NOVEL

BY

LAURENCE OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'PICCADILLY,' 'ALTIORA PETO,' ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXXXVI

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Soth.
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7-3-1923

CONTENTS OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

PART I.—*continued.*

CHAP.		PAGE
XV.	THE FIRST TESTS ARE APPLIED,	1
XVI.	EVOLUTION IN AN EARLY STAGE,	19
XVII.	TIGRANUHE EXPLAINS "THE OCCULT" TO HER BROTHER,	37
XVIII.	PARENTHETICAL AND APOLOGETIC,	56
XIX.	A STARTLING REVELATION,	63
XX.	COUNT SANTALBA DECLARES WAR, AND TAKES THE COMMAND,	80
XXI.	A MASTER-STROKE OF STRATEGY,	98
XXII.	A PRELIMINARY SKIRMISH,	114
XXIII.	THE BATTLE OPENS,	130
XXIV.	THE ENEMY RECEIVES A REINFORCEMENT,	153
XXV.	MASOLLAM UNMASKS HIS BATTERIES,	167

429011

XXVI. AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE AND A HOSTAGE, . 184

XXVII. THE ENEMY'S FLANK TURNED AND THE VICTORY WON, ... 202

PART II.

I. THE MANSION OF A DRUSE CHIEFTAIN IN SYRIA, ... 223

II. SHEIKH MOHANNA CELEBRATES AN AUSPICIOUS FAMILY EVENT, ... 243

III. SHEIKH MOHANNA RELATES HIS EXPERIENCES OF THE OCCULT, ... 263

PART I.

(*Continued.*)

MASOLLAM:

A PROBLEM OF THE PERIOD.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIRST TESTS ARE APPLIED.

When Reginald Clareville came to breakfast, he was more than usually on the alert to detect those signs of a change which the events of the morning, coupled with his own intuitions, led him to forebode. The unwonted appearance of Madame Masollam at that meal afforded him therefore at once a subject of uneasy conjecture, more particularly as it presented forcibly to his consciousness the new relation in which he stood with regard to that lady. He fancied he could detect in the cruel glance

of her eye, as she greeted him, a flash of triumph, and he suspected that Santalba had already communicated to her the result of the morning's deliberations, and the decision at which he had finally arrived.

"Amina sick," she said in English, turning sharply upon him as he was thus ruminating; and then she added some words in Arabic to Santalba, which Reginald did not understand, and concluded her remark with a short harsh laugh.

The Count looked grave, but said nothing; and for the rest of the meal Reginald perceived that he was seriously preoccupied.

"Is Amina too unwell to come to breakfast?" asked Florence.

"Yes," replied Madame.

"Do you know what is the matter with her?"

The only answer Miss Hartwright received was a little upward toss of the head, an almost imperceptible raising of the eyelids, and a slight click of the tongue, which was Madame Masollam's habitual way of implying a negative, and was more expressive than any form of words, as it seemed to convey an intimation

on the part of the person addressed, not only that she did not know, but that she did not care.

"I'll run up and see whether I cannot take her some breakfast."

"From what Madame Masollam has just told me," interrupted the Count, with more vivacity than was his wont—for Florence had impulsively risen from the table—"I think Miss Masollam wishes to be left alone."

Florence hesitated, and looked at Madame Masollam.

"Mr Hartwright can go," said that lady, in her bad French.

Florence seemed perplexed and a little shocked and disturbed at this unexpected suggestion. Sebastian glanced at Santalba.

"Madame Masollam appears to think that her daughter would like to see you in her own bedroom," said the Count, with a marked emphasis, which left the young man more undecided than ever, as it seemed to imply a disapproval on the part of Santalba which he shrank from openly expressing. This was the more puzzling, as, not half an hour since, Sebastian had promised the Count to submit himself in everything to Amina's parents.

"Go to Amina in Mr Masollam's bedroom," said the lady, with her usual abruptness, addressing Sebastian.

"I suppose it will be my turn next to obey orders," thought Clareville to himself, as Sebastian rose and left the table. But Madame Masollam continued her meal, which consisted of nothing but a cup of coffee and a piece of dry bread, in silence; and Reginald and Florence discussed the weather with great earnestness, until, after the lapse of a few moments, they were relieved of her presence.

"Miss Masollam's indisposition will deprive you of her society to-day, Miss Hartwright; but I do not think it is anything serious. I should recommend you to go out for a ride with Mr Clareville. I am sorry I shall not be able to accompany you; but I have much to occupy me." And so saying, the Count, with a polite bow, left the room.

In spite of his great equability of temperament and self-control, Reginald saw that he was much disturbed.

"What strange people they all are! and what a mixture of extreme niceness and extreme nastiness! Don't you think so, Mr

Clareville?" asked Florence, now that they were alone. And without waiting for an answer, she continued, "I think Amina quite the most perfect darling I ever met. My one ambition in life is to try and be like her. I did not know such people existed. How could I, you know, bottled up here with papa and mamma, and Laura, and those empty-headed brothers of mine? It seems as if a whole new world had been opened up to me since I knew her. And then the Count, with his quiet, gentle, strong manner, is a perfect mine of information on every subject, and not a bit conceited. Don't you think him quite too charming? How two such nice people ever came to be so intimately associated with two such horrors as the old Masollams is what puzzles me—doesn't it you, Mr Clareville? I can't bear to think that a person I love so much as I do Amina can be their daughter."

It was in this rough-and-ready form that Miss Hartwright put into her own vernacular, sentiments which precisely corresponded with those of the person she addressed.

"I share your sympathies, your antipathies, and your perplexity in all respects, Miss Hart-

wright; but it is a mystery which, so far, I have been utterly unable to unravel. I have, however, a singular sort of presentiment that to-day we are on the highroad to a *dénouement* of some sort. In the meantime, suppose we follow the Count's advice and take advantage of this beautiful weather. I will go and order the horses. It is not my affair if he set conventionalities at defiance," he reflected, as he thus proposed to carry out the Count's suggestion. "If the Hartwrights did not scruple to leave their daughter here, with no other chaperon than Madame Masollam, they would probably not object to my going out to ride alone with her."

"I wonder what confidential communication old Masollam has to make to Amina and Sebastian;" and Florence added, after a pause, "I don't like it."

"There, again, I agree with you," said Reginald, as he left the room; and the consequence of this little *impromptu* outburst of feeling on the part of these young people, led to an interchange of confidences between them in the course of their ride, that resulted in an alliance which was destined to be cordial and

lasting. As Reginald's own character deepened, he found himself correcting his habit of judging of people by their tricks of manner, their vulgarities of speech, and those superficial or acquired defects which are often mainly attributable to the accident of their early surroundings and education. His socially refined instincts had been so often jarred by Florence, and his attention had been so much absorbed by Amina, that his earlier impressions in regard to that young lady had been decidedly uncomplimentary. Perhaps the high appreciation she manifested for Amina first produced a modification in his sentiments; and then he felt a larger charity stealing into his soul for the world in general, as his own nature softened under the influence of the tender passion which had taken possession of it; and as he found that the aspirations to which his own quickened conscience had given birth, had taken more complete form in the mind of the beautiful creature on whom he had bestowed his love—that they had crystallised with her into a motive power by which she regulated her life, and on which she based her hopes of being of service to her fellow-beings. Flor-

ence, too, whose first impression of Reginald was that he was too haughty and cynical and indifferent to be "quite nice," had modified her opinion of him, under the same benign influence to which he had himself succumbed; while her love for her cousin had predisposed her to overcome all prejudices she might feel against his friend; so that now, under the pressure of that suspicion which they shared in common, and of that danger which seemed to menace the happiness of both, they were drawn into a sudden intimacy in the course of that one *tête-à-tête* ride, which revealed noble and unsuspected traits in the character of each. So true it is, that the grander qualities of the soul not merely lie dormant, but seem crushed out of existence by the platitudes, conventionalities, and the accidents of everyday life and environment, which so disguise and distort character, that the fairest masks may be successfully worn by the most unworthy, and the coarsest and least attractive by those who, in their deepest natures, and possibly unknown to themselves, are the most heroic. It is in the time of storm and stress, when the life-crisis comes, that the true lineaments of the

soul are revealed, and the strength of its fibre is tested.

As Florence Hartwright and Reginald Clareville rode slowly through the leafy lanes, and found a consolation in discoursing upon their mutual anxieties, and in confiding to each other those vague presentiments to which the minds of lovers are constitutionally prone, the shadow of that time was upon them, and they were instinctively bracing themselves to meet it.

They had wandered so far, and they had taken so little account of time, that they were a few minutes late for lunch, and found Amina and her mother, Santalba, and Sebastian, waiting for them. As Reginald touched Amina's hand, with an inquiry after her health; as Florence eagerly glanced at her cousin, to read, if possible, what had happened in his eye,—both knew that their worst fears were already realised. Reginald had told Miss Hartwright of the promise which he and Sebastian had made that morning to the Count, of obedience to the Masollams; and they knew further that, whatever their private feelings might be, Amina was too filial, and Sebastian

too loyal, to refuse compliance with any commands which they might have received. Amina's eyes bore evident traces of tears, while Sebastian sat, pale, silent, and moody, clearly under the weight of some great pressure of spirits. Madame Masollam scanned Reginald and Florence closely, but was reticent as usual; while all evidences of discomposure which Reginald had fancied he had observed on Santalba's countenance had disappeared, and he alone seemed cheerful, easy, and unembarrassed, making conversation for the rest of the party, with that charm of manner which was peculiar to him, and of which the most marked characteristic was that he seemed altogether to forget himself.

It was with difficulty that the equestrians of the morning could restrain the impatience with which they were consumed, to seek the private interviews which each felt to be necessary to the elucidation of the apparently altered position of affairs. There seemed to be no inclination, either on the part of Madame Masollam or Santalba, to throw any obstacle in the way; and Reginald, soon after lunch, found himself alone with Amina in a little morning-

room off the conservatory, while Sebastian had accompanied his cousin for a stroll in the garden.

"Do tell me," said Florence impulsively, as soon as they were alone, "what has happened. I am sure old Masollam sent for you this morning to order you to marry Amina. Mr Clareville told me that you and he had promised the Count to obey the Masollams in everything. It was a most extraordinary thing for the Count to extract such a promise from you; very extraordinary in you to make it; but most extraordinary of all, if you have gone and sold yourself at that old monster's bidding. Not but what Amina is a girl in a million; but she does not love you, Sebastian. I feel almost sure she loves Mr Clareville, though she would rather die than admit it. I have asked her ever so many times."

"What a pace you go at, Florence, and what a hurry you are in to jump at conclusions! First, you are certain that I have been ordered to marry Amina—and next, that she is in love with Clareville; and you have not a shadow of proof for either assumption."

"Well, tell me, have you been ordered to marry Amina?"

"I have been ordered to consider strictly secret everything that passed this morning, with the exception of certain things, which I have been ordered to tell you."

"What are they?"

"One is, that we should not talk to each other, except when it is absolutely necessary."

"What!" exclaimed Florence, unable to believe her ears.

Sebastian repeated the message.

"I never heard of such a thing; I shall write at once to papa, to tell him I shall leave to-morrow, and ask him to meet me in London."

"That was just what Mr Masollam said you would do when I gave you his message; and the other thing I had to tell you was, to beg you not to do it."

"Was the Count present when you had your interview, and received these extraordinary instructions?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say?"

"He never spoke throughout."

"Did Masollam send for him to be present?"

"I don't think so; but really I can't answer any more questions."

"Well, it seems I am the only free person left in this house, and I shall not remain in it twenty-four hours longer."

"I don't think you are quite so free as you imagine, and I think you will remain. Don't look so alarmed; you will not be conscious of any coercion being used in the matter. There now, I have told you all I had to say; you must not be angry with me. Go and talk to Miss Masollam and Reginald about it. I think you will find them in the morning-room. Wait a minute," he added, as Florence was bounding off indignantly. "Let me think a few minutes." Florence stopped, apparently a little overawed by the extreme restraint and trouble evident in her cousin's manner. "Yes," he said at last; "I have a right to say this, and I do so on my own responsibility; I was not told to say it, but I think I may venture so far. I implore you, Florence, even though I may not speak to you, not to leave the house—for my sake."

"I can make no promises. The whole thing

is too monstrously ridiculous and absurd;" and she left him in search of Reginald and Amina. This is what had passed between them.

"I was quite anxious," Reginald said, "when I heard you were ill this morning, Miss Masollam. The more so, because I fancy you must have been taken ill just about the time I heard you call me."

"You heard me call you?" repeated Amina.

"Yes; I could not have been mistaken."

Amina blushed violently; it was the first time Reginald had ever observed her so affected.

"I can assure you most positively, Mr Clareville, that you were mistaken."

"Then how do you account for my distinctly hearing you pronounce my Christian name twice?"

"There are various ways of accounting for it. I believe the most common is by what is called 'telepathy,' but you had better ask the Count for an explanation. I know what passed between you and him this morning. My father and mother were very pleased to hear it, when he told them. They have sent

their first instructions to you through me. I am afraid you will feel them rather irksome; but I assure you, though you may not understand the reasons for directions which may appear rather arbitrary and unmeaning, if you have only courage and patience to endure, the day will come when you will understand."

"What are my instructions?"

"That you continue to prolong your visit here, but that we hold no communion together, beyond that required by bare civility."

"That is the second test, I suppose," said Reginald bitterly, after a pause, in which he was engaged, by a powerful effort of will, in suppressing the burst of rebellious remonstrance which sprang to his lips.

"That is perhaps the second test," she replied; "I don't know."

"I will at least tell her I love her now," he said to himself; "it is my last chance, if we are to be on terms of bare civility for the future." And he was on the point of giving effect to this resolution, when the door opened, and Florence entered.

"Just imagine, Amina!" she said; "Sebastian has received orders from your father that

I am not to talk to him any more. Was ever anything so preposterous? Of course, under these circumstances, I shall leave the house."

"The same injunctions have been laid on Miss Masollam and myself," broke in Clareville, anxious to relieve Amina from the pain of answering.

"Then we will leave together."

"Rather let us stay together. You will not desert me?" and Reginald shot a meaning glance as he spoke, as though to remind Florence of the compact which had been the result of their morning's ride.

"Sebastian asked me to stay for his sake, and I refused; but I will stay for yours," she exclaimed quickly, as the thought suddenly struck her that she was acting under a purely selfish and angry impulse, and that to abandon her new ally in his extremity would be an act of baseness. "Who knows," she gaily continued,—for this young lady indulged in quick transitions of tone and temper, and it now burst upon her mind, or rather upon her heart —for the heart has more to do with such mat-

ters than the head—that as everybody else had been unexpectedly rendered miserable, it was her business to make them all as happy as possible, and to lighten everybody else's burden, without thinking of her own,—"who knows but what this is merely the end of the first game? I always say life is like whist. I will draw up the parallel in detail for you some day, Mr Clareville. After the next rubber, we shall perhaps have to cut for partners again. Meanwhile you and I are to play together. You look so tired, dear Amina; go up to your room and rest, darling, and remember that whatever tricks people may play with our tongues, they can't control our hearts, and you have knit yours to mine for ever. As you could not make that last remark for yourself," she whispered to Reginald, as they left the room together, "I thought I would make it for you, more especially as they are my sentiments as well; and tell Sebastian when you see him that I was too angry this morning to talk sense, and that I am sorry for what I said about his having been such a fool as to make that promise."

"Thank you," interrupted Reginald with a laugh. "I, you may remember, am a partner in that act of folly."

"Yes, I forgot; besides, I didn't quite put it into such strong language as that; but say all manner of nice things to him for me, dear Mr Clareville. These horrid people may prevent our talking to each other; but they can't prevent one sending messages of comfort and consolation, can they?"

CHAPTER XVI.

EVOLUTION IN AN EARLY STAGE.

It required the exercise of all the philosophy of which Reginald and Florence were capable, to enable them to bear the trials of the days which followed what the latter had termed "the change of partners."

"It does not seem to me so very like whist, Miss Hartwright, this game that we are playing," said Reginald one day. "At whist you usually quarrel with your partner; now you and I are very good friends, but we are more disposed to quarrel with our adversaries."

"Oh, you do that at whist too, when they don't play fairly. And I must say I did not expect, when Sebastian and Amina were told to give up talking to us, that they were going to be so awfully attentive to each other."

"Perhaps they were told to be that as well."

"Then they take to their orders very kindly. They seem to enjoy each other's society. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps they say the same of us."

"It is not the same thing at all."

Florence did not say why it was not the same thing; but Reginald understood the full significance of her remark. He knew that she loved Sebastian, and was doubtful as to the extent to which that love was returned; also that he loved Amina, and laboured under the same kind of uncertainty.

"It seems to me," pursued the young lady, "that though I have never promised to accept any tests, they have managed to apply one to me which is just as severe as yours, and a good deal harder than Sebastian's. I cannot get rid of the suspicion, which has haunted me from the first, that we are all the victims of a deep-laid plot on the part of the old Masollams. I am sure that if Amina were told by her parents to marry Sebastian, she would do so as an act of obedience."

"But that implies that your cousin is a consenting party."

"Oh, Mr Clareville, who could resist Amina?"

And Reginald thought bitterly, "Who indeed?"

"I asked him whether anything was said about it, when they were both summoned to that solemn interview, but he would not tell me," pursued Florence.

"And I have done my best to extract some explanation from Santalba, but with an equal want of success." As Reginald spoke, the Count himself entered the room.

"I happened to overhear your last words," he said, "and I think the time has come when I may explain my reticence. Pray don't go, Miss Hartwright; you are as much interested as Mr Clareville in what I am going to say." Neither Reginald nor Florence, who were slightly embarrassed by this sudden appearance of the subject of their conversation, spoke — and a long pause ensued. It continued beyond the limits of conventional usage; but the relations in which these three persons stood towards each other had ceased to be conventional. Santalba, leaning back in an arm-chair, rested his forehead on his hand, and seemed buried in thought. Flor-

ence, unused to such sensations, was conscious of a feeling of awe creeping into her breast, for which she could not account, and which, being naturally an irreverent sort of person, she resented. Reginald, with an organism more sensitive to influences, made no effort to resist the sensation of languor which was stealing over him, and which apparently had the effect of rendering his senses more acutely alive to impressions which were conveyed to them "telepathically," to use the term which has been invented to describe a process as inherent to the law of our being as our digestion, though it is too subtle in its operation to commend itself for investigation by the crude methods employed by science. In fact, in rashly attempting to put his experiences on this and many subsequent similar occasions into words, in a mixed company, Reginald only succeeded in making himself appear supremely ridiculous. "There are persons," he had once said, and he was thinking of the Masollams and Santalba, "who seem to have the power of drawing from me certain positive vital elements, and of reinforcing their own with them, thus producing in me a curious

sensation of lassitude, and rendering me negative to them, and easily influenced by them, while I become conscious of an increase of faculty which enables me to receive impressions, more or less accurate, of what is passing in their minds, and in the minds of others, and of events which are taking place at a long distance. Sometimes this effect is produced upon me irrespective of the personal presence of any one. Sometimes I am conscious of having produced it upon others, without any act of volition on my part; in fact, I feel convinced that we all, to a more or less degree, act upon each other in this way."

Of course everybody laughed. On the occasion of this interview with Santalba, however, he was only becoming conscious of this in a very vague and imperfect manner, for he was still in the benighted condition of the friends by whom he was subsequently ridiculed, and nearly as full of narrow prejudices. At last Santalba spoke.

"It would have been useless," he said, addressing himself more especially to Clareville, "for me to have attempted to give you any explanation of the reasons which have ren-

dered necessary the experiences to which you have been subjected, and which have involved, I am aware, no inconsiderable amount of moral suffering. The parable of the sower teaches not merely the same lesson now as it did the day when it was delivered, but it suggests another. The wise sower prepares the ground for the reception of the seed, and the only way by which the ground can be prepared is through moral suffering, which, as we read elsewhere, afterwards 'bears the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.'"

"Excuse me, Count," interrupted Reginald; "but I have not yet got to where I can recognise the authority to which you appeal as an infallible guide in matters of moral discipline."

"It is not necessary that you should. The truth is one which has been confirmed by universal experience, and if you doubt that, since it rests only on the Bible and on my assertion, it is one which every one can test for himself. You admitted this much in your conversations with Amina, and even went so far as to express your willingness to enter upon the experiment. Those who believe in

a Divine Providence do not need this self-torture, for they find in the suffering which He imposes, that it leads them to a deeper knowledge of Himself, and unfolds to them 'those mysteries of the kingdom of God,' alluded to in the parable to which I have already referred; but for those who, like yourself, are pure materialists, there is no way by which the value of your philosophy can be tested but by severe moral analysis—in other words, by a course of what I may term moral vivisection, which reveals latent potencies and occult forces in the organism, absolutely incompatible with any theory except one, which recognises a source of vital force which I call 'God,' and a continuation in man of that force beyond the grave, which I call "immortality.' I have the less hesitation in asserting that this must be the result of any such moral processes as I propose, because in my own case, as in that of others who were also materialists, the result has been identical. Materialism may be held as an intellectual hypothesis, but it never can be demonstrated as a fact to the inmost consciousness. On the other hand, when the existence of a Deity has

become as positive a fact to the inner consciousness as one's own existence, it is not on that account susceptible of proof to the outer consciousness or mere mentality of another. Hence it is, when such a one demands proof, he must find it for himself. All that another can do for him is to put him on the certain road for finding it, and it is this which, with your consent, I am doing for you. Nay, more —having become aware some time since that I should occupy the relation to you which I now do, I tell you frankly that I have been engaged in inventing the necessary implements of moral torture."

"And you found them in the Masollam family?" said Reginald, with a shudder nearly allied to terror, which he could not repress.

"And may I inquire," broke in Florence with trembling lips, before Santalba could reply, "whether you knew, before you saw me, that I was to be tortured without my consent being asked; and if so, how you knew it?"

"I knew, Miss Hartwright, before I saw you, on my arrival here, what you had then no suspicion of, that you possessed a noble and

magnanimous nature and high aspirations, which were completely buried under a superficial layer of selfishness, vanity, and frivolity; that this could only be removed by an extremely painful process of moral surgery, and that it would fall to me to perform the operation. As to how I knew it, it is not necessary to enter upon that now; perhaps I was helped to the knowledge by my lifelong intimacy with your cousin, and by my acquaintance with your father and yourself in earlier years."

"But if it is going to be so very painful, I think I would rather not have this superficial layer removed," urged Florence.

"My child," said Santalba, suddenly rising and seating himself on the couch by Florence, while he gently took her hand in his, and gazed into her large grey eyes, "you must trust me absolutely in this matter, and I can say to you what I cannot say to Mr Clareville until he has acquired a belief in Him, you must trust God. We cannot disentangle our interests from those of others in this web of human life, and we may often render those we love the highest service by making the

most complete sacrifice of our own affections. It is this sacrifice you are now called upon to make, not for their sakes alone, but for the sake of the great principle of altruism, upon the ultimate triumph of which the whole fate of humanity depends. It is through individual effort that the foundation is laid. Believe me, I do not call upon either of you to make a sacrifice which I have not made myself."

At this point the Count was interrupted by a violent burst of weeping, which Florence was utterly unable longer to control. She felt that she had never known how deeply attached she was to her cousin as at this moment when he was so rudely snatched from her arms. It seemed as though the effect of the last fortnight's intercourse had been to elevate what had hitherto been a sentiment into a passion, and that with a cruel ingenuity she had been allowed to nurse an illusion which had become part of her life, when it was thus violently wrenched from it.

Reginald was so overcome with a sympathy which was the more keen because he was suffering in precisely like manner, that it was

some moments before he could command his feelings sufficiently to find utterance.

"You are aware," he said, "Count, of the mercenary motives which may seem to attach to such a marriage as Mr Masollam appears to propose, and you to abet, between his daughter and Sebastian Hartwright. This altruistic theory, to be worth anything, ought, it seems to me, to hold good all round."

"In answer to the charge of a mercenary motive underlying Mr Masollam's action, I am not now in a position to enter," said the Count, perfectly unmoved by Reginald's insinuation. "You have been allowed a fortnight's unrestricted intercourse with Miss Masollam, on purpose to enable you to judge for yourself whether she is a person likely to be influenced in the way you have suggested; and as for myself, I have long ceased to regard the opinion of any human being as having the smallest weight or value as affecting my conduct. There is only one force which is powerful enough to enable you to arrive at this point of absolute and complete indifference to public or private opinion, and this is a faith in the commanding power of

pure motive. It enables me to remain unaffected by your suspicions. It should enable you to triumph over a selfish passion. If your one and only motive is to find God, and God's truth in regard to man and your duty to Him, and if you have reason to suspect that you cherish a love for a single human being which is more potent in its influence upon your life than the desire for that truth, what alternative remains to you but to crush it out of existence? How do you know of what the affectional and emotional part of your nature is capable, if you confine it to the grovelling desires of the flesh? If you root these out, with a determination to substitute for them a love as intense for the world at large as for one single unit in it, you will enter upon a class of experiences unknown to you."

"Monks and saints have done this in all ages, but I don't know that the world has been very much the better for them," said Reginald.

"But you are neither a monk nor a saint, and your motives would be far purer than any by which they have been influenced. I do not ask you to withdraw from the world, with

a view to secure eternal happiness and to escape eternal misery; but to increase the moral forces of your nature by substituting for its lower desires, the potencies of the Divine love for humanity, so that, as a man in the world and of it, you may be the better able to grapple with its ills, irrespective altogether of what may or may not happen to you hereafter. Believe me," pursued Santalba, and his face seemed illuminated by the glow of the enthusiasm with which he spoke, "I have evidence in my own experiences, and it is open to you to have them, if you have the faith and the courage necessary to bear the trials they involve, which assures me that man's organism is undergoing a change; and the vulgar evidences of it are to be found in the phenomena which have so far forced themselves upon public attention, in the forms of spiritualism, mesmerism, occultism, and so forth, that societies have been formed to investigate them, and journals to chronicle them. This change means a quickening of organic sensibility and an increase of faculty, whereby man's receptivity to forces, too subtle to invade his hitherto dense personality, has

become augmented. So far these forces have found expression in phenomena more or less frivolous and valueless, because their nature and the laws by which they are governed have never been examined, nor could they be, excepting by those who, divesting themselves of every base or personal motive, devoted themselves exclusively to their investigation ; and this could only be done by such acts of entire self-surrender as the one from which you are now shrinking."

"Then," said Clareville, "and you will forgive me if I speak plainly,—although I barely know Mr Masollam at all, and although my acquaintance with you is limited to a few days, while my suspicion of the sincerity of his motives is almost overpowering, and is borne out by appearances against you both, which seem convincing,—you would have me violate my natural affections, and risk the loss of my life's happiness on what must be to me a bare chance — for you admit that it is unsusceptible of other proof than my own experience—that the affection which is thus violently expelled, if expelled it can be, will be replaced by another so much higher and

holier that it will more than compensate for the one I have lost; while the presence of that new affection will have the effect of rendering me personally conscious of a divine source of vitality, to which, in the degree in which I respond to it by further acts of self-sacrifice, I shall become more and more receptive, until I awake to new faculties of a deeper and more interior degree than any I have yet experienced; and you further assert that with this increase of faculty will come a corresponding increase of my power for usefulness in the world."

"I go further, and I say that no great result can possibly be achieved without great risk; because if you were not met at the threshold of your endeavour by doubts and uncertainties of all kinds, the effort would be comparatively slight, and the faith principle, which is one of the most powerful levers of human action, would not be invoked. The strength of your sincerity of purpose, and the value you set upon the discovery of truth, can only be tested by the amount of risk you are prepared to take for it. Once admit the possibility that the secrets of nature conceal

forces yet undeveloped, which may contain a cure for the evils by which it is now afflicted, and it is culpable timidity to shrink from risking all to discover that cure ; and if the nature of that new potency is affectional, as was hinted by the great Teacher when He said, 'A *new* commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another,' it is only by the expulsion of such loves as you now cling to, that room can be made for it. Listen!" and as the Count stopped suddenly, the sound of the piano was heard in the next room ; "it is Amina, and I know from the accompaniment that she is going to try the English version of a little song of mine which Sebastian has translated for Miss Hartwright from the French," and the Count gently rose and opened the door, so that the notes of her rich voice could reach them without impediment, and Reginald could distinctly catch, in spite of the foreign accent of the lovely singer, the following words :—

"Arise, in the light of day that is breaking,
O muse of the future ! its birth to acclaim ;
In the vaults of the past new echoes awaking,
With songs of rejoicing to herald its fame.

'Tis not in the dirge of the night that is dying,
We hear the sweet note of the love that is born;
The storm that is spent bears not on its sighing
The freshness of hope that has burst with the morn.

No longer the lays of the hearts that are broken,
With music of sadness the strain will inspire;
'Tis more than the bliss of which poets have spoken,
That wakes to their triumph the chords of the lyre.

'Tis the song of the soul, whose fetters are riven,
Who dares for the earth its Renewal to plan;
Who hymns in her ecstasy, liberty given,
By loving alone to win freedom for man."

The conflict of emotion which this song excited in the breast of Clareville was almost more than he could bear. While it seemed totally out of harmony with one set of feelings by which he was agitated, there was another chord in his being—and he was conscious that this was a deeper one than the jarred heart-strings—which vibrated to it with a profound response. This was no love-sick ditty, framed to accord with the sentiments by which, as he listened to the voice of her he loved best in the world, he felt his nature stirred; but a melody in which the singer herself seemed carried away by the swelling volume of its notes of triumph, until at last they overcame his own complaint,

and bore him along with her who gave them such glorious utterance in a tempest of sympathy.

"I have made up my mind," he said to himself, as with a final crash the music died away and the singer quickly rose and withdrew; and as he thus gave inward utterance to his determination, he heard what seemed a faint echo of it.

"I am going to give him up for ever, Mr Clareville," said Florence, and the tears gently overflowed their lids as she spoke.

Reginald turned with a bursting heart to where Santalba had been sitting, but the Count had silently disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII.

TIGRANUHE EXPLAINS "THE OCCULT" TO HER BROTHER.

THE sounds of the music which had just ceased, had reached other ears besides those of Florence and Reginald; they had at intervals been faintly audible in Madame Masollam's private little sitting-room, where at that moment she was closeted with her brother.

"Your prediction has failed," he was saying, "and from all appearances I might have spared myself those preparations which you recommended me to make for a journey to Damascus."

"How could I suspect that smooth-tongued Santalba was going to succeed in a fight against me? Listen to that music; it seems to mock my efforts. And I can almost hear the

triumphant laugh of its composer ringing in my ears—but the victory is not to him yet."

"The Master seemed entirely to feel with you, nevertheless, that he was not to be relied upon, when he warned Amina against him at the interview at which I was present."

"Yes; but he has changed since then. The Count managed to be there the next time the Master sent for Amina, and their influences formed a combination which was so strongly supported from the other side, that I was completely overcome; since then I can barely hold my own with the Master. You know how completely he absorbs into himself the thoughts and desires and emotions of those with whom intimate internal relations have once been established. Were Santalba alone I could conteract his influence; but together they are more than a match for me. That was why I tried to get her away. Ah, these silent conflicts of wills and passions, in which never a word is spoken, how much fiercer they are than the war of words, or even the clash of swords!"

"Yes," said Carabet with a short laugh; "talk of skill in debate, or military science,

or any other kind of science for the matter of that—ours is an art of war the world knows nothing about as yet. A contest in which men and women ordinarily are the unconscious puppets; but into which we, who are behind the scenes, can intelligently enter, and fight side by side with the invisibles in their own sphere, in the never-ending warfare of which our unhappy world is the arena. But you have never clearly explained to me, sister, how it is that you and Santalba, who I always thought were ranged on the same side in the great battle for the human race, should now have come into such sharp collision."

"It is a matter of tactics, *qui veut la fin, veut les moyens.* If the end is holy, the means are always justified. There is no cant more absurd than that which denies the truth of this axiom. Yet those who deny it will illogically maintain its opposite; and under the pretext that self-preservation is the first law of nature, will not hesitate to commit a murder, while they maintain armies of assassins for the protection of their country, or even their commercial interests."

"What has Santalba to say to that?"

"Oh, he has absurd scruples as to the way in which money, which he admits is the great material leverage of the world, is to be acquired and used. Religious teachers and social reformers have hitherto failed, because they did not perceive the great truth, that in order to reconstruct humanity morally, you must begin by the reconstruction of it materially and economically—that fine ethics are of no avail, if you have a social system in which their practical application is not possible. How, for instance, can you apply the principle of altruism as a moral law to a society of which competition is the economic basis? In order to render your ethical system possible, you must begin by the industrial reconstruction of society upon a co-operative basis, and in order to that you must have a large capital in cash. And if you have not got it, as no true reform is possible without it, you must beg, borrow, or steal it. You see I don't shrink from my conclusions."

"But Santalba, it seems, does," said Carabet. "How is it that his scruples were not excited before?"

"There was nothing to arouse them, when,

thirty years ago, the Master put before him his great scheme of industrial co-operation, social reconstruction, and moral regeneration, and he became convinced,—by the experiences which, I will say, he underwent with an unflinching courage, and which led him at one time to consent to what seemed to involve certain physical death,—that the human race was entering upon new organic conditions, which would render possible the great endeavour for its salvation which the Master proposed; when, I say, he became convinced of all this, and perceived that everything was stopped because there was no money to begin with, he threw up the career in which he was engaged, and the political ambitions of his life, and, to the astonishment of his friends, entered upon commercial and financial pursuits, in which he soon developed great aptitude. His association with Richard Hartwright, Sebastian's father, proved in the highest degree profitable. The Master soon found thousands of pounds pouring in upon him, and was enabled to come to Europe, and to form an industrial establishment in France—to which Santalba has for many years

devoted himself and his resources—as well as to visit many countries, propagating his views, training new disciples, of whom, my dear brother, you are one of the most trusted; and thereby increasing his resources."

"Yes," remarked Carabet, drily; "although a good deal of what you have told me about Santalba is new to me, I naturally know about what concerns myself."

"Well, you have had the satisfaction of feeling that everything you gave went to a good cause."

"The Master must be a very wealthy man by this time," pursued Carabet, reflectively.

"Yes," answered his sister; "and it is impossible for so much wealth to be in better hands."

"I hope Santalba is not in doubt upon that point."

"I have not asked him; and he certainly has not ventured to say so if he is. The question upon which we have come into collision is not that."

"May I ask what it is?"

"Yes, for I see I shall need your assistance; and you know so much about the

person chiefly concerned already, that I can safely give you all my confidence."

"From which I gather," interrupted Carabet, "that the person concerned is Sebastian Hartwright, and that the question at issue is how to get hold of his million sterling. Well, we are specially provided with an instrument for that purpose."

"Yes; but we can scarcely make use of it if we are opposed by Santalba."

"Are you sure he is opposing us?"

"Quite sure."

"But Amina is devoting herself exclusively to Sebastian."

"It is a blind; that is why I should have preferred her at Damascus. At all events, she could not there be using her opportunities to fight covertly against me as she is now."

"She is a most unnatural daughter," said Carabet, with another of his dry laughs.

Madame glanced at him suspiciously.

"That is the second time, brother, I have heard a note ring false in you. Take care; you know by experience I don't spare my own flesh and blood."

Carabet turned pale; still he plucked up

courage to say, with an almost imperceptible sneer—

"I am aware that it is your opinion, and I thoroughly concur in it, that humanity at large has a claim prior to your own relations. I was only regretting, for your own sake, that you should have to include Amina in that category: on my fidelity you know you can rely."

"I trust so," replied his sister; "for it may be tested more severely than you think."

"In that case I must understand the situation better than I do now, not because I should be an unfaithful, but an unintelligent ally if I did not. So far, I confess, I am completely mystified. It is nearly a year ago since the Master sent me to England, told me to begin business in Tongsley, and keep a special eye on the Hartwright family, obtaining all the information possible with regard to them. Then, a few months later, I am suddenly summoned to take charge of Sada, and no information is given me as to who she is, except what I can glean from herself. However, as you and the Master said you were coming after me at once, that did not matter,

until you delayed so long that my mysterious prisoner excited the gossip of all the tabbies in the town, which was certainly not desirable. Then, instead of all coming together, you and Santalba stay behind till you are telegraphed for; though I wrote you particularly to come with the Master if possible, to quiet Sada, who was getting unmanageable, and had let out to me who she was."

"Well, I have come now, and I have finally relieved you of her presence," interrupted Madame.

"Yes; but I want to understand more of the game. Why did you want the Hartwrights watched? They have got no millions."

"No; but they want Sebastian's. And the Master saw that they would get them by means of the girl, and they would have done so had he not been able, thanks to your telegram, to time his arrival at the moment he did: a day sooner would have been too soon, a day later would have been too late."

"Well, Santalba was an active agent in the affair; he too seemed to want the Master to get Sebastian's money, and to prevent the Hartwrights getting it."

"Yes; he has always been opposed to the marriage of Sebastian and his cousin, and anxious that the young man should join himself, with all that he possesses, to us; but I don't care quite so much about the young man himself, as what he possesses. There is point of difference number one."

"Then why don't you marry him to Amina? Nothing could be easier."

"On the contrary, there are spiritual combinations which render this impossible. They have both been most solemnly warned against falling in love with each other, though I don't think the warning was necessary."

"If you don't want him to marry Florence, why do you keep her here under his eyes?"

"Because it was arranged by Clareville, who wants to make the match, that they were both to go and stay at Clareville Court, where it would certainly have been arranged. It was to stop that the Master telegraphed for us."

"Why don't you let that young sprig of nobility marry Amina? He is not a bad catch?"

"Yes; but he hates us. We should lose

them both if such a thing were to happen now."

"What do you think Santalba is really contriving now, that makes you call him a traitor?"

"I think he is beginning to distrust our motives, as he has already ventured to express disapproval of some of our methods—or rather, I should say my methods—for, if it were not for me, he might possibly get the Master to adopt his."

"Then, in fact, it is a struggle between you as to whose influence is to predominate with the Master?"

"That is what it is rapidly coming to. The internal fight began when we were left alone together in Paris. The jar became almost unbearable at last, though we allowed no sign of it to appear; and he, or rather those behind him, have been making combinations against me ever since. So far as I can see, there is only one course left to me by which I can defeat him; but it is a fearfully dangerous game to play, and one in which I risk all on a single throw."

"You are a clever woman and a brave one,

Tigranuhe. I should be inclined to back you, even if you were not my own flesh and blood, and I set more store by that than you do. I suspect the woman Sada goes for something in this new combination of yours."

Madame Masollam shot a glance of admiration at her brother.

"You are shrewd," she said; "but I cannot gratify your curiosity just yet. To do so I should have to divulge my whole plans, and they are not sufficiently matured. How still everything has become!" she added, after a pause; "it feels like the lull that precedes the storm. I am certain that Santalba is brewing mischief at this moment. I can tell it by the sudden twinge I felt in my side. If I could but divine what it was."

"Ah," remarked Carabet, who appeared to be in a philosophic vein, "what a weapon that speech would put into my hands if I were of a sceptical turn!"

"How so?"

"I should say I don't believe you have any more highly developed faculties than any one else. I disbelieve altogether in this sensitiveness which you claim to possess to the moral

conditions of other persons, and which so often takes the form of physical pain. I should say, if a twinge in your side warns you Santalba is up to mischief, how is it that another twinge somewhere else does not convey to your mind what the nature of that mischief is?"

"It is not necessary for you to tell me that, if you were of a sceptical turn of mind, you would talk like an ass, brother, as in fact you often do; but it is generally from an excess of credulity—as, for instance, when you bother me with interpretations to your absurd dreams. Because, under the operation of a certain given law, impressions can be produced upon the sensorium when the subject is in a condition nearly allied in appearance to ordinary sleep, but in reality widely differing from it; and because those impressions sometimes, but by no means always, turn out to be an accurate representation of events which are actually at that moment occurring or about to occur; and because the subject on awaking from this condition is unable to distinguish it from ordinary sleep, and is duly impressed when it turns out to be a true

presentiment or prophecy,—some persons—you are one of them—never dream without trying to pose as seers, but they do not take into account the number of times their presentiments and their prophecies turn out inaccurate. I really don't know which talk the greatest nonsense, the people who believe too much, or those who believe too little: those who take every phenomenon which is new and striking to them, as evidence of a direct invisible agency which is to be relied upon infallibly; or those who deny the existence of all invisible agencies whatever, because they are so often inaccurate, are always capricious in their manifestations, and refuse to be controlled by the conditions which prejudiced investigators insist upon imposing. How can I tell why certain physical sensations are accompanied with a certain moral consciousness, and certain other physical sensations are not? All I know is the fact, which has been the result of long experience. I cannot often know which to trust and which not to trust, especially in the first openings of sensitiveness to new organisms. I do not even need to see either Amina or Santalba,

to know when they are in secret sympathy, or when in secret antagonism to me; but with such strangers as Miss Hartwright or Mr Clareville, I should need at least to hold their hands, and even then I might be mistaken."

"Is that," asked Carabet, "the way in which you account for the mistakes that the Master sometimes makes?"

"Not altogether;" and a peculiar smile flitted like a ray of cold moonlight across Madame Masollam's severe features.

Carabet's curiosity was piqued by it.

"You are concealing something from me," he said; "would it not help me to know it?"

"I think it might; you would work with me more intelligently if you did, and I think I can trust you, but it is something that even Amina does not suspect." Madame paused for a moment, and then continued: "Credulous people are in their way as exacting as sceptical. They do not make allowance for the irregularity and uncertainty of those phenomena which they term spiritual, of our ignorance of the laws by which they are governed, and for the conflicting, and therefore utterly confusing, influences to which we, whose nervous systems

have become highly sensitised, are exposed. They look to us as infallible guides. If they knew how little we really know, they would shrink from the risk which following our guidance involves; but yet they should not, for we still know so much more, and feel so much more than others, and are so often making discoveries and obtaining new light, that they should risk the danger of great mistakes in the search after higher moral and psychical powers, and the truths they lead us to, in the hope of great results. But as I said before, we have mostly to deal with credulous people, and credulous people are generally timid; but there is this advantage about them, that they are easily imposed upon. And the Master is compelled, in order to retain their confidence, to supplement the peculiar gifts which he really possesses, with subterfuges and *coups de théâtre* carefully prepared, and likely to strike the imagination, based often upon information which he has acquired by ordinary means. I will give you an illustration from his own lips. He told me he surprised Charles Hartwright the other day by drawing from his pocket a cheque with the

exact amount of his most pressing pecuniary needs ready written out upon it. You had already furnished him with the amount, which you had obtained from inquiries here; but he would never have made that hit had he not, when in a trance, seen himself giving a cheque to some one—he did not know to whom. The sceptic would say, Why, when he saw the cheque, did he not see the amount, and the person it was to be given to? One might go on asking such questions from nature for ever. The fact was, he saw nothing but the cheque. But with it there came the impression, which, as it flashed upon his mind, amounted to a moral certainty, that the sum to be inscribed was the sum you had mentioned, which could apply to no other person than Mr Hartwright."

"To tell you the truth," said Carabet, who was listening with great interest, "I have suspected something of this kind before. Tell me, sister, as we are so confidential, does he really see and converse with beings in the invisible world, or is that all humbug too?"

"It is not *all* humbug, more than the other was all humbug, as you call it. Sometimes he

does, and sometimes he does not, and when he does not, if there is an important end to be gained, he is often obliged to pretend that he does. As I said before, *qui veut la fin, veut les moyens.* It is all for the accomplishment of a grand purpose."

"Does Santalba know all about this, and agree in trying to accomplish it this way?"

"I think he is beginning to suspect, and this is why it was necessary for me to say so much, for you must help me to fight him, and you cannot fight a man internally unless you know where the treachery is beginning to creep in. The reason he has not done so before is partly because when he first knew the Master it was not necessary for the accomplishment of his end, as it is now that his wealth and his sphere of action have so much increased, to resort to these methods of supplementing his gifts; and partly because Santalba has, during these last years, become almost as sensitive to the hidden influences in nature as the Master himself,—and one is apt to be less critical under these circumstances of the same gifts in others, provided the trust in the individual is absolute.

At the same time," pursued Madame, with a vicious emphasis, "if his own faculties had not developed with such extraordinary rapidity, he would never have discovered the joint in the Master's armour."

As she spoke thus, her hands clenched themselves nervously, and her face became so transformed by an expression of concentrated rage, that her brother stared at her in horror-stricken silence. "I have been telling you a lie," she burst forth in an uncontrollable fit of passion. "I said I told you all this about my husband, because I want you to help me to overcome Santalba. I do want you to help me to overcome him; but that is only the preliminary skirmish in the great fight. I have a more dangerous enemy still, unless I can make him my slave, and that was why it was necessary to tell you all these secrets."

"A more dangerous enemy still!" exclaimed Carabet, amazed. "Who can he be?"

"The Master himself!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARENTHETICAL AND APOLOGETIC.

I THINK it highly probable that many of my readers, who have followed my narrative thus far with considerable effort, and a sense of growing weariness, will at this point close the book in despair. "We are tired," they will say, "of this perfectly impossible group of people, with their quickened organic sensitiveness, their highly developed inner faculties, their new moral and immoral consciousness, their invisible influences and spiritual combinations, their charlatanism, their aspirations, and so forth. We prefer lifelike descriptions of people that we know and see every day; and if any such mystics or phenomenal beings exist—which we doubt—their phantasies and their vagaries possess but little interest for

us." Knowing how likely this is to be the case, I have far more sympathy with myself than with such critics: they have only had the trouble of reading half the book, if as much; I have had the labour of writing the whole,—a far greater labour than it would have been, if it had been more amusing and generally adapted to the public taste. If I have reconciled myself to a task from which I look for small profits, and still smaller praise, it is because the group of people I have presented to the reader is by no means so impossible as he may suppose, and because, in consequence of a growing tendency in society to dabble in the mystical and occult, it has seemed to me desirable that something should be written to illustrate one form, at all events, of the development this tendency is liable to take; not that I mean to insinuate thereby that any special individuals are necessarily to be assumed to be the originals of any of the characters with whom I have made the reader acquainted, but because the effect of the extraordinary increase of acute nervous sensibility, which is characteristic of the present generation, has already produced several such

persons, and must inevitably produce many more. At present such exceptionally developed types are still comparatively rare, and, by reason of the nature of their experiences, shrink from contact with the world, and above all from contact with those whose prejudices jar painfully upon the raw surfaces of their natures. They feel as if they had lost an outer covering of some sort—had been, so to speak, peeled; and naturally the people who hurt them most, are those who ridicule the notion that everybody's hide is not of equal thickness, and who, having themselves the thickest of all, brush rudely against them.

At present there is no vocabulary invented which can describe the experiences of these more highly sensitised persons; and even if there were, it would be incomprehensible to any except to those who had attained the same degree of susceptibility. Just as there is no equivalent in the language of a tribe of African negroes for the word "hysteria," and it would be extremely difficult to convey to the mind of a Hottentot the idea which it represents, so there is no term by which those who are conscious of a new condition of sen-

sibility, can describe their sensations to those who still remain in the old condition of denseness. But inasmuch as facts are stronger than theories, no amount of ignorance or prejudice can in the long-run prevail against them. And as the new conditions increase, the fact that they exist will come to be generally recognised.

So long, however, as a person refuses to admit the possibility of their existing, so long will he probably be unconscious of any new experiences in himself, the essential condition of their manifestation being, that the will should be a consenting party; for, as the forces operating are will-forces, or at all events can only operate through the will, if there is an obstruction there, they are absolutely paralysed. This does not, however, imply that many do not become invaded by them without conscious will-co-operation. It only implies that any such invasion would be rendered difficult, if not impossible, where there was conscious will-resistance. Nor does it imply that they can invariably be invited by any amount of will-co-operation, as organic conditions of surface denseness may exist which will defy the most

earnest effort. Again, it is by no means desirable, in the majority of cases, that any such effort should be made, as, if it is done ignorantly, incautiously, or from unworthy motives, it exposes the experimenter on his own organism to the danger of serious mental malady. The effort of the present day should rather be to resist the fascination which spiritualism, occultism, mysticism, and kindred investigations exercises over a certain class of minds, as having a tendency to induce these new conditions prematurely, and under influences in the highest degree prejudicial to physical and moral health. What is important is, that their existence should not be denied; because those who deny them,—and this is especially true of medical and scientific men,—render themselves, by the very fact of their denial, incapable of treating the maladies which result from them—maladies which can in many cases be easily controlled by those who understand their cause, without recourse to a lunatic asylum, where they are liable to be aggravated. Hallucination, delusion, hysteria, monomania, and so forth, are all words coined to express phenomena, the origin of which those who

use these terms are absolutely unable to account for or explain, and with which, therefore, they can only deal empirically. If the study of them involves a departure from the region of what is called "positive science," into another region called "mystical," the sooner a distinction so false and so pernicious in its effects is removed the better. There is nothing mystical whatever in an investigation into any of those moral, psychical, and physical phenomena upon which the happiness and well-being of the human race depends; and positive science, which limits itself to the investigation of facts which can only be dealt with by the aid of chemical appliances and the most external senses, and which leaves out of account all those forces upon which emotions depend, is so shallow, that it might well be called "negative" instead of "positive," in so far as its results are concerned.

My apology, then, for dragging the reader into company which is new to him, and for making him listen to conversations which must occasionally sound very like gibberish, is not because I am mystical myself, or wish to present to him a fantastic picture of human

nature and its workings which does not actually exist; but in order to illustrate thereby one mode of manifestation of that more intense degree of human faculty which is developing in the present day, of which all history from the earliest times contains scattered evidences, but which, owing to the entirely altered conditions that have resulted from the tendencies and appliances of modern civilisation, is developing more universally than it ever could before, and which, while I believe it can be most wisely and judiciously ordered and applied for the benefit of the human family, will, if allowed to run riot, be productive to it of serious disaster.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

EVER since the departure of the Hartwright family, Masollam had confined himself almost exclusively to the privacy of his own chamber. At times his bent form might be seen, either alone or in company with his wife, in a retired part of the grounds, which he had made a formal request through Santalba might be reserved to his own exclusive use; for it was one of the peculiarities of his nature that the sphere of its operations, excepting on rare occasions, seemed in no way to depend upon any direct personal contact with those whom he desired to influence. Even Clareville, though he resented the idea in his own mind that he was in any way awed or controlled by it, was conscious that he was under the same spell by

which all the other members of the household were to a greater or less degree affected, and made up his mind to break it if possible by intruding upon the sanctity of the Master's seclusion, and, in spite of all prohibitions to the contrary, forcing an interview. His remembrance of the only occasion when he had held any conversation with Masollam was so unsatisfactory, that he desired to renew the experience, with the hope of arriving at some more definite conclusion with regard to his mysterious host, than he had hitherto been able to do. He had found himself compelled to dismiss from his mind his first impression that he was a mere shallow impostor. He had that remarkable analysis of his own character in his pocket to prove the contrary; he could never forget that he was Amina's father; and he had now seen enough of Santalba to desire to know more of a man who appeared to have acted through so many years of the Count's life, as his guide, philosopher, and friend. Other motives contributed to urge him to take a decided measure of this kind. He was beginning to find that, so far as Amina was concerned, though the spirit might be willing, the

flesh was weak; and her apparently exclusive devotion to Sebastian had become so keen a torture to him, that he had more than once nearly arrived at the determination not merely to leave the house but the country, and seek in some retired spot abroad, a refuge from the conflict of emotions by which his soul seemed torn, and in which fidelity to his pledged word, loyalty to his friend, an aspiration after an ideal love, and a passion he vainly strove to vanquish, were all struggling for the mastery. On the other hand, he felt that to desert the field of battle would lower him in the estimation of her with whom he most wished to stand high; while he sometimes doubted whether his present suffering would not rather be enhanced than otherwise by an absence which would remove him from the beloved presence, only to render keener the pangs of memory. As he never could forget his love, would it not be easier for him to subordinate it to a higher one in Amina's very presence, where the tension was greatest and the stimulus most intense, than in solitude? And was not the best person to consult in his stress of soul the father of her he loved, to whose positive instructions

all the pain of his present position was due? He would approach him in a very different spirit now from that which he had manifested on the memorable night when he had so brusquely expressed his indifference to the whole family. So far he admitted himself conquered, and he wondered at his own humility. But if he had ceased to be rebellious, he was not yet resigned, and in this respect he differed from Florence.

"I can't bear this any longer," he had said to her one day. "I shall go away."

"I can't bear it much longer either; but I shall stay," she replied.

"Why? You promised to give him up for ever. You are not going to break your word, are you?"

"No; but I did not promise not to die, and I would rather do that here, where I shall be near him."

"You don't mean that you will commit suicide?"

"No, I shall not require to do that; but I feel this is killing me. I might live, possibly, if I went away; but I don't want to. If the people who try to rise into these new condi-

tions the Count talks about, suffer as much as I do, I don't think many live to reach them."

"That depends on their constitutions, I suppose," said Clareville, practically. "I think I suffer as much as it is possible for a human being with passions to suffer; but I don't the least feel as if I should die. I'm tougher than you, perhaps. And now I come to think of it, Miss Hartwright, you have changed terribly this last week. God—I am assuming there is one, you know—can't mean people to go through such tortures as this to find Him."

"I *have* found Him, Mr Clareville."

"Oh yes. You always believed in Him. With me it is different."

"I may have believed in Him; I don't know. I think I only said I did; but that is different from finding Him—from actually feeling Him. Now I know Him; before I had only heard of Him. It is all the difference between believing in a country you have heard of, and going to that country yourself. Now I have been there," and as Florence lifted her eyes, Reginald fancied he perceived in them an expression he had never observed before. "That

is why I am so ready to die," she added, after a pause.

"Yes; but that will be dying for love of Sebastian, and not for love of God. That is not winning the victory."

"Oh yes, it is. I won it when I gave him up for ever; that is past and done with. If the effort caused a wound which was fatal, that is no business of mine; the victory is none the less won. I have a new and higher love now. That is why I want to go to God; but that does not prevent my wishing to stay near Sebastian till I go."

It was this conversation which confirmed Reginald in his resolution to seek an interview with Masollam. There must be something in a man, he thought, who could produce such results. No doubt much was due to the influence of Santalba; but the latter admitted that he owed all in the first instance to him, whom he called the Master; and Reginald wished to feel this direct influence, and to judge of its effect upon himself, and its bearing upon the problem that lay nearest to his heart.

It was on the afternoon of the day after the conversation which has been narrated between

Madame Masollam and her brother that this interchange of sentiments took place between Florence and Reginald; and it was no sooner concluded than the latter, upon the impulse of the moment, stepped out into the garden, to see if perchance he could find Masollam alone. He had, however, scarcely taken two steps in the direction of the old man's accustomed haunt, when, to his surprise, he was met by Amina.

"I come," she said, "with a message from father. He says that he has been conscious for some days past of the strong desire you feel to unburden yourself to him, and of your determination to seek an interview with him at the first opportunity. He bids me tell you that he is unable to resist this wish on your part any longer, though he says that it would have been far better for all concerned if you could have controlled it, as it will probably precipitate a crisis which you may have reason to regret. If, after hearing this, you still wish to see him, you are to follow me."

"Better a crisis, whatever it may be, than this protracted suffering. I follow you," replied Reginald.

Masollam was seated on a rustic bench, with his eyes closed, as the pair approached, but showed no sign of consciousness of their presence.

"Sit down by his side, and don't speak," Amina whispered; and Reginald obeyed, while she remained standing.

"This friend," began the old man, after a long pause, in his far-off voice, and with eyes still closed, "has undertaken a task beyond his power. He is bearing a burden which is too heavy for him. The spiritual influences which are concentrated upon him, by reason of our presence here, have become too potent for him. He is like an object which has been placed under a burning-glass, and the heat of the rays that are focussed upon him have become intolerable. His instinct to seek a solitary retreat was the right one. He must withdraw himself. His longer presence here would cause unnecessary pain to others besides himself."

Amina held up a warning finger to Reginald, who was about to speak.

"Do you know where he should go?" she inquired in a soft voice.

"No."

"Do you know how long he must remain away?"

"No."

"Do you know whether he will ever be united to us again?"

"No"—a spasm, as of acute pain, passed over Masollam's face, and he added, as if unable to control the utterance—"and yes."

"I don't quite understand, father. No or yes?"

"Both."

"When ought he to go?"

"At once. That is all. I can't bear him so near me any longer. Send him away, but stay with me yourself."

Reginald slowly rose, and was about to resent this summary dismissal in the strong language which rose to his lips, when he felt a touch on his arm. As he turned, and met Amina's eyes, he read in them all, and more than all, that his soul had longed for. Their yearning expression of ineffable tenderness seemed to melt his whole being. There was no room for him to doubt that he was loved now, and loved with a passion equal to his

own. Had it been less, she might have needed words to give it expression. As it was, she had but to open some invisible flood-gates of her nature to allow the currents they had dammed to overflow into his. And in the exquisite sense of that commingling of deepest and holiest feeling, he knew more than speech could have conveyed. So carried away was he by the overwhelming tide of his emotion, that he not only forgot his indignation but the cause of it, until Masollam's uplifted voice burst upon the silence like a thunder-clap, and, on looking at him, he saw his eyes gleaming upon him with apparent fury.

"Go! I say," he shouted; and this time Reginald, too full of bliss to be conscious of insult, with one last look at Amina, who had sunk on the seat by her father's side, glided swiftly and silently away.

"My child," said Masollam, after a long pause, during which he was conscious that Amina's frame was trembling with fear and emotion, "I do not blame you. What has just happened has proved to me that the moment I have so long and ardently desired has arrived; the moment which will ensure

to me the consummation, I will not say of my happiness alone, but of what is far more important, of my power; the moment when you will be called upon to give the supreme proof of your devotion to the great cause we both have at heart. Listen, child, to your history, which it has never before been permitted to me to communicate to you. Though accustomed to call us your parents, you are not our daughter. It is now nearly twenty-five years since Santalba, then my most cherished pupil and disciple, arrived at our door at Damascus with a baby scarce a year old in his arms. It was during the time of the troubles of the Druses and Maronites in the Lebanon. He happened to be present at one of those murderous onslaughts which the contending parties made on each other's villages, and he was the means of saving you, a little Druse infant, from massacre. Your mother was not to be found in the *mêlée;* and supposing that she had fallen a victim to a fanaticism which spared neither age nor sex, he brought you away and consigned you to us, to be brought up as a child of the new era which is dawning on the

world, and to be prepared from your infancy for the great work which he then felt was in store for you, and which I, with the aid of some old astrological lore to which I then clung, but which has since been superseded by higher knowledge, was able to confirm. You know the rest: you know how, when you were about ten years old, I took you to France, and how, for the subsequent seven or eight years, you were a ward of Santalba's, and treated like a daughter by that angelic woman, his wife; how no trouble or expense was spared on your instruction, while he himself educated you in those deeper knowledges of which he is a master, and filled you with those nobler aspirations which have guided his life. Then, when I felt that you were sufficiently prepared, I returned for you. We travelled through many countries, in order that your mind might be still more enlarged; and finally we went back to Damascus, where it was my greatest delight to develop, by close and constant intercourse, those remarkable internal gifts, which, joined with your exceptional faculties of brain, proved the correctness of those previsions which in your infancy invested your future

with such high promise. The time for their still more ample fulfilment has arrived. It has been long looked forward to, both by Tigranuhe and myself, and it was one of the reasons which, anticipating a long stay in this country, induced me to bring Sada with me. You remember a journey I made a few months before we left home, and my return with her, after an absence of a few weeks. The object of that journey was to verify the intelligence I had received from a Druse, that your mother still lived. And in Sada, my dear child, I found her."

Masollam paused, for Amina, overcome by the suddenness of this revelation, and invaded by an unaccountable dread of some unknown catastrophe, had burst into a violent fit of weeping, which she was unable to control.

"Does she know I am her daughter?" she sobbed out at length.

"No; I wished you to be the first to tell her that. All she knows is that she has come to England to find you, and she has been waiting here so long, that her impatience has become almost unmanageable. That was why I was obliged to move her from Carabet's quietly

to this house; besides, she had already begun to excite too much gossip and curiosity. The circumstances of our own journey, and the duties which delayed me on the way, compelled me to send for Carabet to bring her on before us, otherwise she would have remained with us."

"Does she suspect nothing?"

"No; because she found you at Damascus with us, and was told that her daughter was in England. That was why she consented to come."

Amina was too full of her own thoughts to be able to say more. She had always felt a coldness in Madame Masollam that repelled her, and she was surprised herself at her indifference to the extinction of the tie which she had hitherto supposed existed between them. But this sudden introduction of another, so new and unexpected, produced a shock which seemed to stun all her natural affections.

"You will remember, Amina, I always warned you against a love which was based upon no higher sentiment than that of blood. We cannot do our duty to the human family if we cling exclusively to our own; and this

was the more important, as I knew the day must come when this revelation would have to be made, and you would be called upon to substitute a new relationship for that which has hitherto bound you to us."

"A new relationship," murmured Amina, and she felt a sensation of tightening round her throat, as though she was being strangled by an invisible grip.

"I have told you," pursued Masollam, "that she whom you have called mother was not your mother; but that is not all. I must add to it, that she whom I call wife has never been, legally speaking, my wife. We acknowledged no allegiance to any existing form of religious faith when she, then a young girl, in obedience to the mandate of an unseen power, resolved to unite her efforts and link her fate with mine, in the endeavour to turn to account the gifts of which we found ourselves both possessed. You have the evidences of your own senses and experience to testify to the extraordinary clearness of her insight, the correctness of her intuitions, the magic of her touch in cases of disease, the whole-souledness of her devotion. You know

of what heroic acts of self-sacrifice she is capable, under that stern and somewhat cold exterior. You know how dauntless her courage, how inflexible her will. There was no other woman who could have carried me through the suffering I was called upon to endure, upon whose wise counsel I could so thoroughly rely, upon whose enduring fortitude I could so absolutely depend. We have been all in all to each other for forty years—co-labourers and co-sufferers. You know also that alone I am powerless; that it is only a woman who can feed me with the elements which are essential to the ultimation of my forces, which need this conjunction to render them operative. Hence, when she whom I called my wife could not be with me, I needed you, whom I called my daughter. It is this nominal relation that must now be changed to one which will be real. Hitherto it is Tigranuhe who has reigned. For the rule of the man is naught without the woman. And in this lies the most delicate of all her functions, that she alone can judge when her own reign must cease. I have long been waiting for her to tell me that the time had come. And it

needed a woman of Tigranuhe's heroic temperament for me to trust her so far—nor, as the result has proved, have I done so in vain; though she has since confessed that even her courage gave way at the prospect of the sacrifice it involved, and that she made an effort to separate us a few days ago, when, under her influence and inspiration, I charged you with being false to your trust, and had nearly sent you to Damascus. Then, in a magnificent reaction against her infidelity to her own higher instincts, she announced her repentance to me this morning in these words, 'I am guilty. I have clung to my position, and to the power it conferred upon me, too long. Of my own free will I now come to abdicate it. And I do more; I tell you there is only one who can give you the fresh elements you need for the new work upon which you are entering—and that one is Amina. Let her, who has been hitherto my daughter, henceforth become my mistress and my queen.' And these words I, as your master and your king, now in my own name repeat."

But Amina heard them not; she had fainted.

CHAPTER XX.

COUNT SANTALBA DECLARES WAR, AND TAKES THE COMMAND.

CLAREVILLE'S first instinct on leaving Masollam was to hurry off in search of Santalba. He felt that it was due to the Count to tell him to what extent he was conscious of having failed to fulfil his pledge. He would tell him that, though he had not succeeded in conquering his love, he was still resolved that he would not be conquered by it; and he was amazed at the strange fact that this resolution had only asserted itself as a force in his nature since he had become certain that his love was returned. This he could in no way account for. Until Amina's passionate gaze had penetrated to the very recesses of his soul, he had felt all the weakness and vacillation of a love-

sick swain battling against an unrequited affection, which he was unable to control. Now the very quality of the sentiment was changed. It remained as strong as ever, but it made him stronger. He seemed to derive from it the very force which was required to make him its master. He could wait now, for he knew that she could wait—could wait, if need be, beyond the space of mortal life; for he knew now that they were bound to each other by a stronger chain than that which any law or church could forge, for it was one which no law or church could tamper with or break. As his whole being became flooded with this new conviction, he turned aside, under its influence, from the hurried quest of Santalba, which had been his first impulse, and sought the solitude of his chamber, there to commune awhile with his own soul. As he entered it, he became aware of a sense of exultation that was new to him. It seemed as though a separation had taken place between his natural form, which was treading the floor, and what appeared to him his real self, which had cast off a burden, and was treading the air. But sensations of this sort

are as impossible to describe to those who have never felt them, as colour to the blind. I have merely made the attempt, because the effect of it was to force Reginald to alter his original purpose, which had been to throw himself at full length on the couch, and, much to his own surprise, to fall on his knees beside it. He had been in this posture but a few seconds, when he became further aware of an inner glow, as if that part of him which I have described as having become light, was also becoming warm; but he perceived that this warmth in no degree affected the normal temperature of his external body, and he was the more surprised by this, because this internal heat increased until it would have been unbearable, had it not been accompanied by an extraordinary influx of vital energy, under the pressure of which an outer shell or husk, which seemed to enclose this inner part of him, felt as though it had burst and given way. If one can imagine the sensations of a seed, which, under the influence of the sun's rays, bursts its surface preparatory to sending forth a shoot, some idea may be formed of the process which Reginald now appeared to his

own consciousness to be undergoing. But there was a new experience still in store for him, and this was a revelation which can only be very imperfectly described. He now seemed encompassed by a great luminousness, and he knew, in that light and glow, Divinity had manifested itself to him, for he was invaded by a sense of awe which almost deprived him of consciousness; and in the awe which he felt he was further aware that it was not merely a vague force which had produced it in him, but a Great and Incomprehensible Personality, and when he dared, he lifted his soul to commune therewith, for he felt irresistibly impelled to do so. And there entered into him a love as overpowering as the awe had been, and after the love there entered into him a joy as overpowering as the love had been. And he rose from his knees, and, feeling exhausted, stretched himself on the couch, and fell into a deep sleep. He knew not how long he slept; but when he woke he found Santalba standing by his side.

"I have come," he said, "because you called me."

"I did not call you," answered Reginald.

"Yes, you did, as Amina once called you; but I knew you needed me, even if I had not heard you."

"I do, indeed; I was on my way to you when I felt I required a few minutes' solitude first."

"And they have brought you all you looked for."

"More, far more than my most sanguine expectations could have conceived. Indeed I looked for nothing when I came in here; I but followed blindly some instinct, but now I know it was God-given. I seem to have undergone such a wonderful transformation that I can scarcely realise that I am the same man."

"You are not the same man, my dear friend;" and Santalba bowed his head, and Reginald felt that he must keep silence.

"May I tell you," he said at length, when Santalba once more looked up, "what has happened?"

"I think I know; but speak."

Reginald then narrated the circumstances of his interview with Masollam. The Count listened intently.

"More has happened since then; the time for action has arrived. I have been preparing for this; my plans are all laid. It needed this to open her eyes," he murmured, partly to himself. "I had to wait for it. Do you mean to obey Masollam's orders, and go at once?"

Reginald looked up, amazed at the question. "How can you doubt it?" he said; "did you yourself not extract from me, as the first test of my sincerity, the promise that I would render unquestioning obedience to Mr Masollam and his wife?"

"I did; and as I took then the great responsibility of that act, I now assume the responsibility of releasing you from the promise you then made. So far as the Masollams are concerned, you are free. Ask me no more now, for I have no time to explain the sudden change in my attitude towards them, which thus involves yours, and which, in fact, is not so sudden as it seems, though the moment for its disclosure had not before arrived. Your speedy release from their thraldom is your reward for the faith and courage you manifested in placing your neck under their yoke. Still, without

doing so in obedience to Masollam, it will be well for you to leave this without delay; but under very different conditions from those which he would suggest. Had you formed any plans as to where you would go?"

"That was just the subject in regard to which I wished to consult you. I thought of first going home to say good-bye to my people, and then abroad."

"If you could dispense with your visit home, I will give you the address of a place to which I should like you to go at once, and take some one with you."

"Take some one with me!" repeated Clareville, with some surprise.

"Yes; I don't think, when you know who it is, you will object very strongly," returned Santalba, with a smile. "I shall want you to go by the night-mail, which passes Tongsley at one A.M."

"I remember that is the one by which the mysterious female, formerly in Carabet's keeping, was supposed to have been spirited off; but we never could find any trace of her."

Santalba started. "Carabet! the mysterious female!" he exclaimed; "you never told

me you knew anything about Carabet or any female."

"Oh, I forgot—I meant to; but so many things have happened to put her out of my head since her disappearance. I wonder Sebastian never told you."

"There have been reasons why my intercourse with Sebastian has been limited to topics which would exclude references of this sort. How did he come to know?"

Reginald now very frankly gave Santalba an account of Sebastian's preliminary investigations and of his own suspicions. "As these died away, my interest in the matter faded," he added; "and Sebastian never showed any when once he became convinced that you must be cognisant of the whole affair."

"She was not spirited away on the occasion you mention, but, on the contrary, brought to this house, where she has since been concealed; but I want her to be spirited away to-night by that very train, and I want you to do it."

Reginald made a decidedly wry face. "That kind of thing is not at all in my line," he said.

"I have never practised the art of secretly running away in the dark, especially with single women. I think I must decline the commission."

"I don't think you will, for three reasons. The first and most important is, that if your experiences lead you to trust me, that trust must be as absolute as it was when you gave it to Masollam; and if it is absolute, as I know a good deal better than you what this crisis demands, you must consider me your commanding officer, and obey me implicitly. I have too high an opinion of your loyalty to wait while you balance the *pros* and *cons* of this proposition, because I know the conclusion at which you would arrive. I take for granted, then, that one reason why you will take charge of this single woman, as you call her,—but there you are wrong, for she is a widow,—is because I tell you. The second reason is, because this widow is Amina's own mother; and the third reason," pursued Santalba, unheeding Reginald's exclamation of surprise, "is that I intend that Amina herself shall accompany you. Now, am I right? or do you still insist upon disobeying my

orders, and decline to run away secretly with these two single women in the dark?"

"Oh, I obey; you have taken away my breath, and my scruples vanished with it," said Reginald, with a laugh. "But may I ask, what is the objection to my conveying these two ladies away openly?"

"The very simple one that you could not do it. We are playing—or, I ought rather to say of some of us, playing—with edged tools, my dear Reginald,—you must let yourself be Reginald to me henceforth,—and we could no more extract those two women from the grasp of the Masollams openly and in the light of day, than you could take them out of any other prison in which you knew them to be confined. They are as much shackled by the wills of the Masollams as if they were chained to the walls of their rooms with rivets of iron. Amina, because it has been the habit of a lifetime to subject her own strong will to theirs; her mother, because she has scarcely any will of her own at all. Still, it would be easy to get away Amina alone, owing to a circumstance which, I feel strongly impressed, has just happened—which I have had reason for

some days to expect as probable—and which Madame Masollam planned in order to get rid of her under a very different escort from yours ; but it is of vital importance to both of them, for reasons which you will see the force of later, not to lose their hold on the mother,—and Amina, who, if I am not much mistaken, now knows that her mother is here, would not leave without her. Besides, Masollam, who in certain aspects opposes his wife in this matter, will fix his will to hold her. I have had to calculate all the forces at work very nicely to be at all sure of success—even secretly and in the dark, as you call it. If we attempted it when they were all awake and active, a most serious injury might be inflicted upon her we both love and desire to save, which might result in her physical death. I see you are astonished ; but I make use of no empty formula when I say that such struggles as the one upon which we are now engaged, are often literally struggles of life or death. At this moment the one longing cry of Amina's heart is that I should come to her, for she dare not come to me. She is lying spellbound, I think," added the Count, speaking as though under a

heavy strain, "in her own room; but that I cannot make out." At this moment Clareville's servant entered the room. "Will you allow me to send for my man?" asked the Count, turning to Reginald; and on receiving an affirmative nod, despatched a summons to him. "Is your man thoroughly to be relied on, Reginald?"

"He has been with me for ten years, and I think I can answer for him."

"Then tell him, when he comes back, to go into town and make arrangements for a fly to be here at midnight. It must not come into the grounds, but stop in the road near the lodge-gate; and let him give the servants to understand that you are not going to leave till to-morrow."

Reginald made another wry face. "I never ordered my servant to tell a lie before; he will think I have gone mad."

"It is no lie, for it will be after midnight; besides, *À la guerre comme à la guerre.* You might as well say that it was a lie to make a feint to deceive the enemy in time of war. When he sees who your companions are, he will understand. Are you quite sure you

never told him to tell a lie for you during all these ten years, when there was a lady in the case? Come, refresh your memory."

Reginald blushed consciously, but was saved a reply by the entrance of Santalba's servant, with whom his master exchanged a few words in Spanish. "He has been with me thirty years," he said, as the man went out, "and I have sent him as a spy into the enemies' country. In ten minutes he will come with an accurate report of the situation, derived chiefly from the woman who acts as Madame Masollam's maid, but who is heart and soul devoted to Amina."

"It seems strange to hear you talk of people as your enemies for whom a short time ago you expressed a most unbounded devotion, and in whom you had such entire confidence."

"They are not my enemies; but I have had evidence within this last week that they have ceased to be the friends of God or man. Once my eyes were opened, I perceived, on looking back, that this was no new thing; and that it has now become my duty, in the interests of the cause to which I have dedicated my life, and to which I believed they had

dedicated theirs, to destroy an influence which is all the more pernicious, because it still can wear so fair a mask. But enough of this now. The developments which must occur will illustrate my reasons better than any words of mine. But none can ever know the agony that the discovery has caused me—how reluctantly I made it, and how still more reluctantly I enter upon the conflict which it involves."

Reginald now rang for his servant, gave him the necessary instructions, and had scarcely sent him upon his errand, before the Count's returned and made his report. "Beg Mr Hartwright to come here," he said to him, after he had heard it. "We must take Sebastian into our confidence, Reginald, and probably Florence too, before we have done; but we can hardly invite her to come to your bedroom. She has a brave and loyal heart. If any one of you three had failed in meeting your tests —and you very nearly did, my friend—this battle had gone against us."

"Sebastian had not a very severe one. In fact, I don't know that he had any test at all."

"Oh yes, he had," replied Santalba, "perhaps the most difficult of all. You will know it later,—here he comes. Wait outside the door till I want you, Juan," he added to his servant. "Sit down, Sebastian; we have sent for you on a serious matter. Now, Reginald, tell your story."

"The loss of Clareville means the loss of so much spiritual power on our side, that is why Masollam wants to get rid of him," continued Santalba, when Reginald had finished; "but he has another and a worse motive, which can only be thwarted by immediate action." The Count then explained to Sebastian that the woman whom the latter had caused to be watched at Carabet's, was now under the same roof with himself, as well as her relationship to Amina; and the determination he had arrived at that both the women should leave The Turrets that night under the escort of Reginald.

"And as," he pursued, "it is essential to the success of a well-conducted retreat that it be covered with as much noise and smoke as possible, in order to distract the enemy's attention, I have sent for you, Sebastian, to

help to make it. Take pens and paper, both of you. You, Reginald, write a note in French to Madame Masollam—she understands that enough to make it out—and tell her that you are going to leave to-morrow morning, and earnestly request a private interview as soon as possible, not merely in order to take leave of her, but because you have a subject of great importance to discuss with her, and are unable to leave until you learn what her sentiments may be in the matter."

"But I haven't," interrupted Reginald.

"Oh yes, you have; you must implore her first to give her own consent, and then to plead with Masollam to consent to your marriage with her daughter. You can do it in bad French—the worse it is, the better she will understand; and it doesn't in the least matter whether you understand her reply. All that is necessary is to distract her attention from other subjects, and force her to concentrate it as much as possible on the one you have suggested. And you, Sebastian, write to Masollam, and say that your friend Clareville has informed you that he is going to leave to-morrow, and that you have made up

your mind to leave with him, and that you will probably be accompanied by your cousin Florence, and that you both wish to see him to say good-bye. You must prolong this interview as long as possible. You can end it by acceding to his desire, which he will press upon you, that you should both stay. What I want is to divert the attention of the Masollams from Amina and her mother, until I have had time to talk to them without fear of interruption. To add to the confusion, the servants will be allowed to give vent to their indignation while you are thus engaged, in regard to certain domestic grievances, and what they term 'the natur of the carryins-on in this 'ere 'ouse,' one of which is the discovery, which they made a few days ago, of the presence in it of Amina's mother. I have bribed their silence hitherto through Juan. Meantime," continued the Count, also providing himself with a sheet of paper, "I will write a line to Amina, telling her, on a summons which I will send her in the midst of this confusion, to meet me in the garden. At this moment she is lying prostrate with grief in

her own room. She needs all the comfort and strength a letter can carry her."

After a few minutes' more conversation, in the course of which Sebastian was more fully instructed in regard to certain points upon which he desired information, the three letters were written, and Juan intrusted with the mission of seeing that they reached their respective destinations.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MASTER-STROKE OF STRATEGY.

MASOLLAM had been obliged at last to call Madame to his assistance when Amina fainted. He had made one or two attempts to restore her; but each time he touched her for that purpose he was himself seized by such violent cramping pains, that he was compelled to desist. The effect of Tigranuhe's touch, on the other hand, seemed magical; the girl recovered, not slowly and with effort, as is usual in such cases, but instantaneously, and with a start. Then silently the three walked to the house, and Amina went straight to her own room to render some account to herself of the nature of the fearful blow she had received, and seek for light. Her habit of unquestioning faith in him, whom she had always re-

garded not merely as a natural father, but as the most highly gifted and divinely inspired of human beings, had become so confirmed, that, in spite of the terrible revelation of a love, and the proposal of a union which violated all her pure and maidenly instincts, she still shrank from doubting him. Had not the experience of a lifetime convinced her that he was the instrument chosen by God for the accomplishment of the divine purpose on earth? And if that purpose could not be accomplished except at the sacrifice of all that a woman holds most dear, what better evidence could she give of her supreme devotion to a cause which, as she believed, involved the future development and wellbeing of the race, than offer herself, a willing victim, on the altar of humanity? One before who had died for it had said, "Greater love hath no man than this, than to lay down his life for his friends." But a woman had something dearer to lay down than her life. And as by woman sin had entered into the world, so now it was through woman's sacrifice that it was to be redeemed. She had been accustomed to this theory from her youth, for it was a favourite

one of Tigranuhe's, but had never till now anticipated its realisation in her own person. The instinct of sacrifice, she remembered, had underlain the theologies of almost all ages and peoples, until it had culminated in Christianity, in the sacrifice of the Deity Himself; but even in this case it had still remained a sacrifice of blood. Was not this principle of sacrifice still to hold good in the coming era, in which she had been taught woman was to enter upon new and higher functions, though the sacrifice was to be of a different kind? Was not she, perhaps, the one chosen of God to inaugurate it? And when could that sacrifice be more complete than at the moment when, for the first time in her life, she had felt the emotion of love for one of her fellow-creatures transcend that for all others? when she felt her heart, as it were, taken by storm and carried out of her own keeping, with all its wealth of love, to be treasured in the breast of another, as she was now treasuring his love in hers? She must not only slay that love, but she must cause to be slain within herself the very principle which gave it birth. As she thought thus, and nerved

herself to form a resolution, her whole nature became the arena of a conflict of doubt and contending emotions, which caused her an agony so acute, that she seemed again to be losing consciousness, and a gross darkness fell upon her spirit, which, as it were, shut out from her all sense of God. While she felt thus utterly desolate and abandoned, one seemed to come to comfort her: but his words of tenderness were as the points of daggers, each one a stab that pierced her heart; and his twining caresses were like venomous serpents twisting themselves round her form; and the glances that shot from his eyes were not those of love, but darting flames that scorched and withered what they touched. But she failed at first to see the form of him from whom these influences emanated, until it became illumined by a faintly lurid glow, and in the distorted human figure which for a second seemed to take shape within it, she recognised Masollam, and she started with a cry and opened her eyes, and saw standing by the bed—on which she had thrown herself—her whose throne she was to take.

It was exactly at this moment that Clare-

ville woke from the sleep into which he had fallen, to find Santalba near him.

"I touched you," said Madame Masollam, "to bring you back; you were seeing too much."

"Too much, indeed," murmured Amina, who now sent forth that mental cry for help, and coupled with it the name of Santalba, which conveyed to the Count, not merely the expression of her suffering, but a vague consciousness of her actual position.

Madame Masollam now entered upon a series of ministrations of a nature known to herself, with the view of calming her patient and her rival, and rendering her more negative to the influences which, with a view to the accomplishment of her own ends, she desired to bring to bear upon her. It was while thus engaged that her waiting-woman, an Oriental who had been with her from youth, entered with Clareville's note. Amina was in too unobservant a mood to perceive the expression of perplexity, doubt, and surprise which passed over Tigranuhe's face as she read it; then, taking the maid aside, Madame whispered, "Tell him I will meet him at once

in my sitting-room. You can show him the way to it."

There was an expression of triumph in her eye as she returned to Amina's side, which indicated that she saw her way to turning this meeting to good account. After a silence of a few minutes, she stooped down and kissed her, saying as she did so, "Rest quietly now, and do not think, because you are in trouble, that you are abandoned either by Providence or by us who love you so much."

At the last words Amina shuddered, and Tigranuhe glided from the room. In less than ten minutes the same maid reappeared.

"Here is a letter for you this time," she said. "I know what is in it. I am to tell you the moment when you can slip out and meet the Count in the garden without being observed. You had better get ready at once; it may be very soon," and she tripped away again to reconnoitre.

Amina rose from her bed, still trembling with the emotions by which she had been agitated, but steadied and strengthened by the restoratives which Madame Masollam had applied, and above all by the assur-

ances of help which the Count's missive conveyed. After a short interval the girl reappeared.

"Who was the letter from you gave to mother?" asked Amina, pronouncing the last word with an effort.

"From Mr Clareville; and she is now seeing him alone in her room; and the Master has just sent for Mr Sebastian Hartwright, in answer to a letter from him. Is it not strange?" All this was spoken in Arabic. "Now I will go first; I don't know why the Count is anxious you should see him so secretly."

"If he is anxious, it is because there is some good reason. I know I can trust you, Zarifa. You must not let father or mother or any one know."

"On my head be it. Am I not yours in life or death? But this is the first time you ever wanted to conceal anything from the Master or the lady."

"I will explain it all later—only be silent and secret. Now you can go back to my room, and wait for my return, and if father or mother send for me, make any excuse you

like for my absence, only don't say I'm with the Count."

Amina found Santalba on the same rustic seat on which she had listened to Masollam's revelations so short a time previously. As soon as he observed her approach he rose, and advancing a few steps, extended his arms towards her. In a moment she had fluttered into them like a hunted bird.

"My poor child!" said Santalba, gently stroking her head. "Why, my love, you have been enduring agonies. Tell me everything, and never doubt my power to protect you, even from him you have called father—but who can never more be either Master or father to you or me."

Amina looked up at him with a startled expression.

"Do you speak thus of him?" she said. And then she told him all, and the doubt she had felt whether it was not her duty to compel herself to obedience to what might be in fact a divine command, and the vision by which it was followed, and her fear to attach any importance to it, lest it might prove nothing but a temptation from the opposing influences

to divert her from the path of duty, because it seemed so hard.

"The opposing influences to the divine will," answered Santalba, "are those which have taken possession of one who once, I believe, honestly tried to be its instrument; but who has allowed a base and selfish passional force to burst through the barriers which should have been opposed to it, and so to pollute the divine love-currents, the purity of which it was the effort of his former life to protect, that his whole moral consciousness has become perverted, and his powerful organism has been taken possession of by the enemy. He is like a fortress which was the key of the position, and which has changed hands. It behoves us, who have formed part of its garrison, to escape without delay, and seek some point of attack upon, and of defence against, the influences which have received such a powerful reinforcement. When the general of an army turns traitor, it is long before such of the rank and file as have remained true, can recover from the shock, and reorganise sufficiently for the purposes of a campaign. You are a long way from

that yet. But this, Amina, I tell you solemnly. Your duty is to escape at once; delay may make it impossible. Mine is to linger yet a little, to cover the retreat. Reginald Clareville leaves to-night by the mail. I have arranged with him to wait for me in London, whence I will take you straight to the home that is prepared for you. You will be accompanied by your mother, whom you tell me you have not yet seen, but whom it is essential that I should see. It was I who saved your life when you were an infant—it will be my task now to restore you to her arms. See, here comes Juan, with news probably that the coast is clear."

It was thus that Santalba, scarcely allowing Amina time to think or speak, carried her along with him in his plans for her safety.

"The servants have all gone in a deputation to make known their complaints to Madame Masollam," said Juan, with the suspicion of a smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"This is the propitious moment, then, for my visit to Sada. Follow me in ten minutes; I will prepare her to receive you." And Santalba hurried to the house, towards which Amina pensively strolled. Ten minutes after-

wards she gently opened the door of the room which she knew had been appropriated to her mother's use.

"This is not the first time you see her," said Santalba, as she entered, and the woman rose with trembling eagerness to embrace her daughter, "but the knowledge was hitherto kept both from you and from her."

"Mother!" exclaimed Amina, opening wide her arms.

"My child! my cherished one!" and Sada threw herself into them, overcome with the torrent of her emotion, "my heart! my eyes! Why did these cruel people keep us apart, when we were so near? Why did they torture me with useless longings? How could they listen to you, when you tried to stay my grief with promises that if I would have patience I should see my daughter, and not say, Behold her! she who vainly tries to comfort you is in herself the comfort you yearn after? Ah, how was it, that at those moments nothing cried out within me, She is bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh? Oh, my loved one! my loved one! thought of so long, sought for so vainly!"

"Not vainly," said Amina, smiling through her tears, "since now you have found me, and nothing but death shall part us."

"I will leave it to you now," interrupted the Count, "to explain more fully than I have been able to do, that, if this hope which you have just expressed is to be realised, your mother must make preparations to leave with you to-night. She must not travel in that costume. Perhaps you will be able to fit her with one of Zarifa's dresses. Explain to her that the Masollams must be kept in ignorance of the discovery she has made, in case either of them visit her to-night, which I don't think likely; and you, my child, will need all your self-possession and strength of nerve, to enable you so far to dissemble your feelings as to prevent any detection of the revolution which your sentiments have undergone. Had Masollam been what he once was, he would have been conscious of that change ere now; but since he has allowed his breast to become invaded by an unholy passion, his insight has become dimmed. He is, in fact, though he would not admit it, enveloped in a cloud of thick darkness, which conceals us

both from his inner vision; and Tigranuhe, who in old days was to him only a sister, would have been the first to tear away the scales from his eyes, and help him to see clearly. But since she too has fallen, she is herself so entangled in the web of her own personal ambitions and morbid jealousies, that she only sees the pictures which are presented to her mental vision by the malign influences which surround and control her, which are fantastic and phantasmagorial representations of the unreal. And these are the pictures which he, whom she calls her husband, now sees, and which have taken the place of the true ones he once saw; but he knows it not. Thus are we protected from discovery by the fumes which their own evil passions have created, and which hide us from them. But, though their inner sight is blinded, and their inner touch deadened, and their inner hearing confused and dull, their external senses are still acute, and their natural intelligence is quickened by suspicion; hence it is desirable that, as speedily as may be, you go and see both, and lull them with the soothing spell of your sweet and gentle influence, which they

crave for after all the agitation and turmoil to which for the last hour or two they have been subjected, and so you will secure yourself a more certain chance of being undisturbed later."

"Shall I put them both to sleep?" asked Amina, simply. "No one knows the art of calming their pain and giving them rest from suffering as I do; for have they not trained me in it all my life? Each needs a different touch, and an act of will adapted to their separate conditions. "Ah me!" and a sigh escaped her involuntarily. "When I am gone, what will become of them at such times? who will then fulfil my functions?"

"Amina!" interrupted the Count, with more sharpness than was his wont, and with an expression of marked anxiety on his features, "another such sign of weakness, and we are ruined. Unless you would have the fate of all others you dread, to close in upon you, barricade, as with iron, the gateways of your sympathy. There must not be a lingering regret; there should not be a trace left of an affection that must, for the present at all events, be obliterated. Open but the smallest

crevice of tenderness, and the enemy will rush in at it, and will bind you hand and foot before you are aware. The day may come when you will feel a love for your jailers greater than you have ever felt, for it will be based upon a divine compassion; but you must not admit it until you have escaped from their clutches. Harden your heart, then, and arm yourself with such weapons as you feel you need, with which to burst open the doors of this moral prison-house. I also have my duties to perform, and must not linger longer here. Clareville, Juan, and Zarifa have full instructions; you have only to follow them."

"Stay," he added, interrupting himself; "there is one thing which I had almost forgotten. Be careful to take your diamonds with you."

"But they are not mine; they belong to Madame Masollam; only the Master always insisted that I should wear them, because, he said, they possessed a peculiar virtue. The necklace, which contains the largest, attracts so much attention, that I dare not wear it."

"They are all mine," replied Santalba, "and

I do indeed attach a value to them beyond what they are intrinsically worth. Do not hesitate, therefore, to obey me in this matter. And now, dear child, be brave and strong. It will not be long before we meet again; till then, God have you in His keeping."

CHAPTER XXII.

A PRELIMINARY SKIRMISH.

THE Count's precautions had been so well taken, that the delicate operation of a midnight flitting of three of the inmates of The Turrets was accomplished with all the secrecy necessary for its complete success. Amina abandoned the greater part of her wearing apparel, thus reducing her luggage to the smallest possible dimensions. Neither she nor the Masollams had appeared at dinner, after which meal the Count took the opportunity of explaining to Miss Hartwright the changes which had occurred in the moral relations which had hitherto held the party together, and the necessity of the step which three of them were about to take. He begged both Sebastian and Florence to retire early to their

own rooms, but not to rest. It was important, he said, that they should remain awake until the dawn of day, and he expressed his intention of keeping a like vigil. Florence asked why this was necessary, but failed to understand his explanations; and certainly, if I attempted to give them here, the reader would find himself in the same case.

"I do not wonder," said the Count, "at my inability to make you understand this necessity. Its comprehension can only be acquired by experience, and by the realisation which experience alone gives of the very actual, and, I may almost say, tangible nature of the struggle in which we are engaged. For we literally do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but with powers that need a spiritual alertness which it is impossible to exercise during sleep. You may not be conscious while you are awake to-night that you are really helping our friends to escape safely, but you will be."

"May I read?" asked Florence, somewhat alarmed at the dulness of the prospect.

"Yes; provided you do not become too much absorbed with what you are reading."

"Shall you read?" she asked again.

"No; I shall be hard at work the whole time."

"Hard at work at what?"

"Hard at work at hard blows, Miss Hartwright," continued the Count, with sudden emphasis. "There will be an unexpected arrival to-morrow, and we shall have to meet an entirely new set of complications, and I am going to spend this night preparing for them. I should not have found that out had it not been for a hard blow or two given and returned this afternoon. So now, go to your rooms, both of you, and see that you don't go to sleep on your posts."

"Mayn't I slip up and say good-bye to Amina?"

"Certainly not," and the Count stalked off.

"How stern he is!" she remarked to her cousin. "I never saw him in that mood."

"He has got heavier work on hand, I take it, than he ever had before, and so have we, so don't let us begin by disobeying orders," and off went Sebastian.

"Dear me!" mused Florence, thus abruptly left to her own meditations, "I suppose I shall

understand it all some day; but how on earth humanity is to be benefited by these midnight elopings, and midnight watchings, and imaginary fightings, I can't make out. I wonder whether it is the devil himself the Count hits with his blows, and whether he ever throws his inkstand at his head, as Luther did. Of one thing I am certain," pursued Florence, as she pensively lighted her bedroom candle, "there is a ghost lately come into the house. I have heard his footsteps twice distinctly. And he is a very cold ghost, for there comes a rush of icy air past me at the same moment, so he can't be the devil,"—with which consolatory reflection she locked herself into her room for the night. Her window overlooked the avenue, and there was just glimmer enough of moonlight for her to see flitting along it the forms of Juan and Clareville's servant and Zarifa, carrying baggage, followed by Reginald himself, with a woman, whose figure was strange to her, on his arm, and Amina by her side. They were all walking on the turf by the side of the road, to avoid crunching on the gravel, and so silently glided into the darkness.

"They seem rather ghost-like," she murmured to herself, and then sat down to read Tupper's 'Proverbial Philosophy.' Now, to read a book to keep you awake, which you have expressly chosen in order not to be absorbed by it, is to expect from it a quality unknown in literature. At all events it was not possessed by the work under Florence's perusal. First her lids dropped, then the hand that was holding the book, then the book itself, and finally her head drooped over on one shoulder, her breathing became longer and deeper—in fact she fell fast asleep.

For about half an hour her respiration was tolerably regular, then became uneasy and oppressed, and at last gasping and spasmodic. Then with a violent effort, during which she clutched wildly in the air with her hands, she awoke. She rubbed her throat, as though unable to realise fully that the grip by which she thought she had been almost strangled was loosened. "I certainly distinctly felt the clasp of five fingers," she murmured to herself. The candle was still burning; and trembling, partly with alarm and partly with the vehemence of her recent effort, she looked round the

room, half expecting to see the assailant whose clutch she had just experienced, visible in some part of it. She was still conscious of a violent palpitation of the heart and a feeling of suffocation, and struggled to the window, and threw it up to let in the fresh night air. She leant out of it for some time, and with a gradual sense of relief she recovered her calm. Suddenly she was startled on looking down to perceive the figure of a man immediately beneath her. He looked up quickly and caught her intent gaze, and she saw it was the Count. He waved his hand to her as a sign of recognition, then fell on his knees, raised his hands in an attitude of prayer, remained in that posture for a few seconds, then rose and disappeared. She seized instinctively the meaning that the gesture was intended to convey. "Now I understand why he told me not to sleep," she thought, as she retreated to her bedside; "he must have felt I was in danger, and come there to guard me. This is what he meant by hard blows. How my heart still beats! I wonder whether some of the people who die so suddenly and mysteriously in the night,

of what is commonly called heart disease, might have lived if they had watched;" and Florence dropped on her knees by the side of her bed, and did not rise from them till the first grey streak of dawn warned her that her vigil was at an end.

Those early rays streamed into other windows besides Florence's. They awoke from an uneasy slumber Amina's mother, with her feet tucked beneath her on the seat of a first-class carriage, and enabled Clareville to see clearly, for the first time, the features of her whom, if his aspirations were ever fulfilled, he must some day call mother-in-law. He was angry with himself for the shock this reflection seemed to produce upon his system. He had never before distinctly realised that he wanted to marry a Druse. Removed in her infancy from the debased and half-barbarous surroundings of the race to which she belonged, Amina had, under the influence of a Parisian training and Santalba's enlightened guidance and tuition, developed into a product of the most advanced state of civilisation. Indeed her natural intelligence was so great, her power of observation so quick, and her op-

portunities for exercising them had been so varied, that she far excelled in mental development the average young lady of the period; while the strange and altogether exceptional experiences of her life had called into play a class of faculty which, in the mood in which Clareville then found himself, exercised a peculiar fascination over him. But the contemplation of her mother, fresh caught from the wilds of the Syrian mountains, excited in him another and counter-current of emotion, which jarred painfully on his more refined susceptibilities. He tried to picture to himself the likeness of the father, and found himself wondering whether this exterior of mind and person, which had so charmed him, might not, after all, be a veneer which time or surroundings would wear off, and expose the savage within. If, when you scratch the Russian you find the Tartar, what might not be the result of a similar process on his lovely *vis-à-vis?* How much of the Druse, pure and unmixed, would be revealed? and what was the Druse, pure and unmixed, when you got at it? He looked at the middle-aged specimen in the corner, and though her expression

was soft and amiable, and her features by no means uncomely, the inspection was not reassuring. There was an utter absence of that mind, or rather soul, which gave life and animation to Amina's features, and constituted their principal charm. Her father must have been a remarkable man, he thought; and his meditations diverged into speculations on the laws of heredity and the influences of environment, and the nature and extent of the change of which human nature might be rendered susceptible by it. As he thus pondered, he stole a glance at Amina, and found her large soft eyes fixed upon him with an expression of intense anxiety and melancholy. He felt conscious that the sympathy which had been established between them enabled her to probe, as it were, into the very inmost recesses of his thoughts, and his blood rose to his cheek as the consciousness rushed in upon him that they were unworthy of her. Instinctively he sought to read hers, and the turmoil in his breast increased as he became aware that the effort had, as it were, opened the door by which he became a sharer of the turmoil to which she was a prey. What was his

conflict of emotion, what his suffering, compared to hers? He had thought a moment before that it might cost him an effort to retain the full force of his love for her; but what was that effort compared to the one in which she was engaged, in realising that a wide gulf had been fixed between her and the woman she was henceforth to call mother—whom she was henceforth to cherish with a daughter's love, and nourish with a filial tenderness — to whom she was henceforth to be bound by closest ties of duty, and with whom she was to create new bonds of sympathy? He found she was wondering why there should be so much effort in all this—how it was that the knowledge of the relationship did not create spontaneously a deeper love for her whom she now knew to be her mother; and he also perceived that the pain of this reflection was intensified and overshadowed by a great fear which had invaded her soul, and so crushed her spirit that her physical frame seemed to quiver beneath the pressure—and this was, that the discovery of her race and origin might cost her his love. He saw as with illumined sight that her natu-

ral life depended on elements which she derived from that love. The sudden rupture of the tie which had bound her to the Masollams, the shock of the attendant circumstances which had produced that rupture, left her now so stripped and bare of human sympathy and support, that he knew he had become essential to her life. He saw more than this: for a moment he imagined that she had sunk in the struggle, and that she had passed away from his existence, leaving him desolate and alone, because he had refused to sustain her with all the force of his affection; and he, too, felt that with her his own vital energies had sped, and that his own hold on life had thus become dependent on hers. And the cloud which had overshadowed him passed away, as the formula in words suggested themselves to his mind, "One in life, and one in death." And when he looked up at Amina again a faint colour had risen to her cheeks; but her eyes were cast down, and tears trembled on the lashes, and he knew that the flush was the current of returning life, and that the tears were tears of joy.

"Do you remember," he said softly to her,

with a smile, "when I once asked you to tell me something of your former history, your saying that you would choose your own time and method for gratifying my curiosity?"

"Yes," she replied. "I should have said that God would choose it. I have erred in many things, and in none more than in trying to use the little knowledge that I do possess, in order unduly to impress the imaginations of those I desired to influence."

"To assume that they have imaginations which it is easy to impose upon," returned Reginald; "and in some cases you run the risk—as I am now free to confess you did with me the first time we met in the House of Commons—of creating the exactly opposite impression to that which you desired to produce."

"I see it now,—it is the trick of the charlatan and the impostor. Looking back, I observe that it has been unconsciously growing upon me under the influence of constant contact with Masollam, who, of late especially, lost no opportunity of thus playing upon the credulity of those whom he made his dupes. Now that my eyes are opened, I am amazed

at the extent to which I myself was one of them, and at the insidious process by which the personal conceits engendered by such exceptional faculties as he possessed, are able at last to dominate the whole moral nature, blinding alike those who have attained to, and those who are struggling to enter upon, this higher development of human faculty. Considering the fearful dangers which attend both the achievement and the endeavour, it is no wonder that God has so jealously guarded it with tests and ordeals, that few are prepared to make the attempt. The experience," she added, after a pause, "of the last twenty-four hours, has been one of such deep humiliation and discouragement, that, had it not been for that best and truest of earthly friends, Santalba, I think my reason would have given way under the strain."

"As it is," interrupted Reginald, "they have removed my doubts, dissipated my fears, established my hopes, confirmed my resolutions, and united me for ever in aspiration, and in daily effort and practice, with those whom henceforth I love best in the world." He would have said more, when he felt him-

self suddenly checked by a force even more powerful than the passion to which he was about to give utterance. "Do you know," he added, "whether you have any brother alive?"

Amina looked up, a little surprised at his sudden change of tone. "I will ask my mother," she said.

"You had one," Sada answered; "but he was killed that dreadful night when you were saved."

"Will you tell her," pursued Clareville, "that I hope she will let me take the place of the son that she has lost; and that I look forward some day to going to her native mountains, and having a home there as well as in my own country?"

"I think I had better not tell her that," said Amina, blushing and looking slightly embarrassed, for Reginald had never before expressed himself so clearly as under cover of this ingenious remark. "I will tell her, if you like, that you hope some day to visit her in her own country." And for the remainder of the journey Amina was fully engaged in answering her mother's questions and satisfy-

ing her curiosity in regard to the events of her own past life.

Santalba had furnished Clareville with an address in London to which he was to proceed with his charges, and where he was to await his arrival. As they drove out of the station, they met a stream of cabs carrying passengers to the early Northern express; and, in a hansom which shot past, Reginald thought he recognised the face of Charles Hartwright. Nor was he mistaken. The three weeks which had elapsed since the proprietor of The Turrets had taken his hurried departure from Tongsley, had sufficed for him to place his family in lodgings in France, and to enter into negotiations with some foreign capitalists, with regard to an enterprise which involved his own immediate return to London on a short business visit, during which he determined to run down to his old home from Saturday to Monday, with a view to examining the situation with more calmness than he had been able to do when he left it, and, if expedient, to carry off his daughter. There had been a tone of mystery and reserve in her letters to her mother and sister, so foreign to the usual style

of her correspondence, that the curiosity and suspicion of both her parents had in different degrees become aroused; and the sight of Reginald Clareville and Miss Masollam together in a cab with an unknown lady, which had flashed suddenly upon Mr Hartwright's vision as he passed them, was eminently calculated to stimulate the sentiments by which he was at the moment animated. In order, however, that the reader may appreciate the position of matters as he found them on his arrival at The Turrets the same afternoon, it is necessary for us to make a more rapid journey than Hartwright to that interesting centre of operations.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BATTLE OPENS.

It had become, for some days previous to the flight which we have described in the last chapter, the habit of Mr Carabet to pay a matutinal visit to his sister. Now that he had been so fully taken into the singular confidences of that lady, these interviews became more necessary than ever—and, in fact, he was closeted with her at the very moment that Charles Hartwright was taking his ticket for Tongsley.

"Shall you see Clareville again before he leaves?" he asked, after listening to Madame Masollam's account of the interview she had had with Reginald on the previous day.

"It is not necessary; he is satisfied with the assurances which I gave him of my sym-

pathy, and my promise that I would use my influence to forward his wishes with regard to Amina. I strongly impressed upon him at the same time the necessity of patience. It only remains now for me to see the girl herself."

"It was a bold game," said Carabet. "Supposing she had taken a different view of the Master's proposal?"

"I should have been vanquished—irretrievably vanquished. I have felt the Master for months past struggling to free himself from my influence. His tyranny, had he escaped from it, would have been insupportable. He might have driven me to desperate measures. As it is, he has hanged himself with the rope I gave him, and my supremacy is assured. These foolish Western sisters of mine, who are struggling for what they call 'woman's rights,' little imagine that their battle is being fought and won. They don't yet understand that every victory which is won in the region of external nature, is only the re-enactment of a victory which has been already gained in the sphere of internal nature—that, in fact, all human events here are but the representations of events which have already transpired else-

where; and that hosts innumerable may be engaged in a warfare, the scene of which is limited to the organisms of half-a-dozen human beings, who thus become the force-transmitting mediums into the outer world, of the results which have been achieved in the inner. But I must stop preaching, and go and give Amina her instructions. The perceptions of the Master have become so blunted and confused, that he positively imagines that she was so overcome with the honour of his proposal, that she fainted from joy and triumph. I have kept him in that delusion, which I wish to dispel in my own way. Do not go till I come back."

Carabet had not long to wait. In less than five minutes his sister returned, with her usual aspect of severe imperturbability considerably ruffled.

"Amina has fled," she cried, "with her mother and Zarifa, under the charge of Mr Clareville!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Carabet. "How have you found it out?"

"Oh, there is no mystery about it now. After looking in vain for Amina in her own

room and Sada's, which I also found empty, I went in search of Zarifa, and stumbled upon Juan, the Count's servant, who had the impertinence to say that he assisted in carrying their luggage and helping them off, a little after midnight. Was I not right when I told you the Count was brewing mischief?"

"Well," said Carabet, "the Master is just the man to call him to account for it."

"Not now—not now. O cunning Count! you waited till that Delilah had shorn his locks, and then you spirited her away!" apostrophised Madame Masollam, evidently not without a certain admiration for the tactics which had been displayed by Santalba. "And you are lingering now," she went on, "to give him his *coup de grâce;* but if the man is fallen, the woman has risen: it is me you must meet! *à nous deux*—to us two now!"

"Then it would seem you have another man to vanquish before the woman's rights victory can be said to be assured?" said Carabet, with one of those sly glances in which his sister always read a doubt that aggravated her. She gave a little click with her tongue,

and threw her head back with a gesture of contempt.

"I will go and break the news to the Master," she said; "he will be more rudely undeceived than I intended. Meantime you had better have your breakfast here: we shall be sure to want you;" and she left the room.

There was a peculiar wildness in Masollam's eye, altogether foreign to its usual expression, as he listened to Madame's revelation of what had occurred. For the first time that astute woman observed that his mind had lost its balance, and observed it possibly not without a secret sense of satisfaction.

"How are the mighty fallen!" was her first thought. "What use can be made of the mighty after they have fallen, if their fall can only be concealed from those who still believe in and trust them?" was her second.

"Santalba must be sent for at once, and crushed," was what she said.

"Crushed!—crushed!—ah, yes," and Masollam ground his teeth; "but how?"

"With his own money. If he ceases to obey us, he is a beggar. Amina and Sada must instantly be restored to us—above all, Sada."

"Why above all Sada? I say above all Amina!"

"Because with Sada we can always hold Amina."

"And with Amina can we not always hold Sada?"

"No. She would never put herself in our power again, but would seek help to steal her daughter from us, and would find it. Besides, she is worth more to us, for other reasons, than the other; but we will insist on both. I will bring my brother, who is here, to you, and you must send him instantly for Santalba."

The old man bowed his head in acquiescence. "Go," he said to Carabet, when that worthy appeared, "and tell Count Santalba that I desire to see him here immediately." And then he mumbled, as if to himself, "The diamonds!—the diamonds!"

Madame Masollam's sharp ears caught the words. "Ah," she exclaimed, with a start, "that he should be the first to think of them!" and jumping from her chair, she hurried from the room. "Stolen!" she said, when, after an interval of a few moments, she returned. "She has gone without leaving a

trace. Had she not taken them, she would have left a line to say so."

"I did not think it of her," murmured the old man. "It is not possible, Tigranuhe."

"I tell you it is possible. Everything is possible when Santalba inspires."

"Well, we must arrest her for theft. They are mine. Santalba gave them to me."

"Yes; for a certain purpose. Did you apply them to it?"

Masollam did not answer, and his wife remained buried in thought, her countenance meanwhile assuming a peculiarly vicious expression.

Meantime Carabet, who had sped on his mission, found the Count in Hartwright's private den, which he had appropriated to his own uses since he had virtually taken charge of the domestic concerns of the establishment.

"Tell the Master," said Santalba, after he had heard the message, "that, if he wishes to see me, I shall be happy to receive him here, but that I refuse to go to him."

"Do you venture," replied Carabet, "to send him such a message? Are you not aware

that the consequences may be terrible to you?"

"To him, you mean. But you came, I think, to give me a message, not advice. Be good enough to return at once with mine, or I also may be tempted to advise."

The sternness of the Count's manner was so different from anything that Carabet had ever observed in it before, that he judged it most prudent to withdraw without further remark.

He had no sooner done so than the Count hastily rose and proceeded to the door of Florence Hartwright's room. Knocking at it, he called out, in reply to the query from within, "Come without delay to your father's smoking-room." He found Sebastian already dressed and writing. "Come with me at once," he said; and Sebastian, leaving his MS. on his table, instantly complied.

"I wish both you and your cousin Florence to be present at an important interview which I am about to have with Masollam."

"But this is not the way to his room."

"No; but it is to mine. Understand that I win a point in the fight if I force him on to my ground, instead of meeting him on his."

" Why, what on earth can it matter whose room you see him in ? "

" You would need to understand more than I can explain now to appreciate the importance of this consideration. You must get rid of the idea that the influences which surround us, and whose help is invoked in the struggle, for the right, or the wrong, as the case may be, are independent of all material considerations, because the matter of which they are composed differs from ours. They have still too much in common with us for that. I have summoned Florence, because numbers are important as well as place."

They had scarcely entered the room when Carabet reappeared.

" The Master," he said, " declines absolutely to come to you, and desires me to say that if you refuse to go to him, the consequences be on your own head."

" Return," said Santalba, " and tell the Master that I leave this afternoon for France, with Mr and Miss Hartwright, on important legal affairs which nearly concern him, and in regard to which I shall be prevented from conferring with him amicably, unless he is in this

room within ten minutes from this time." And the Count drew out his watch. "It is now ten minutes to nine."

When Carabet duly delivered this message, Madame Masollam trembled—not for herself, for she was a woman of undaunted courage, but for him, through whom, to outward seeming at all events, the battle was to be mainly fought; for she knew her husband's true nature, and that the leonine aspect, the flashing eye, the sonorous voice, the imposing and often menacing gesture, all contributed to form a mask, behind which there cowered a most craven spirit—a spirit which, even in the days when it was animated by high and lofty motives, needed encouragement and support, but which, now that it was paralysed by a selfish passion, and a sense of conscious apostasy to the faith which had made it strong, was a feeble, quivering thing, that could only be galvanised into audacity at moments when danger was remote.

"I wish you had never sent for him," he murmured pettishly; "he might have remained here quietly, and with time and opportunity I could have regained his allegiance. Now you have precipitated a rupture,

and it is we who are forced to render an account to him, not he who is summoned to answer for his conduct to us. I don't want to see him or call him to account for anything. Suppose we send him a friendly message of adieu, and let him go. He will not carry out his threat. His old affection for me will prevent that. Indeed I cannot understand the reason of this sudden change of feeling about me."

"I can," remarked Madame, grimly. Masollam looked up and tried to read her meaning, but failed. "Don't you see," she pursued, "what you will lose by shrinking from this struggle? Not only do you allow the diamonds, which are a fortune in themselves, to be taken from you; but," she added with vicious emphasis, striking the one string which she knew would vibrate, "you lose the girl who stole them. And, what I think of far more importance, you will lose, unless you take immediate measures to prevent it, Sebastian Hartwright, at the moment when his capture, with all his great wealth, was almost assured; while Santalba will win him, and perhaps invoke the law to attack your interests in France, where you are most vulnerable, and

the whole fabric, which it has taken us years of effort and of suffering to rear, will be crumbled to the dust. Do you not see that defeat means that hundreds who now believe in and trust you, all through Europe and the East, will lose confidence in you? that the loss of that confidence means the loss of the material benefits which it confers, and may involve large pecuniary claims against you? Pluck up your courage, and since he seems to fear to face us, let us go and face him. Carabet, you accompany us. We shall be three to one."

"Three to two," interrupted Carabet. "Mr Sebastian Hartwright is with him. It only wants four minutes to the time specified; you have not a moment to lose."

"Hasten on before, then, and tell them we are coming." Madame Masollam laid her hand on her husband's head. He sighed heavily several times, and then, with what seemed an almost superhuman effort of will, he started to his feet. His attitude became erect and commanding, his eyes sparkled, his wrinkles seemed to vanish as if by magic.

"Come!" he exclaimed, as he crossed the room with a light springy step, "I cannot

bear myself thus long. We must win at the first onslaught or not at all. I shall not have strength for a second."

On entering Santalba's room, Masollam approached the Count, who gravely rose to meet him, with a jaunty and cordial manner. If he was surprised at finding Florence there as well as her cousin, he did not show it. After greeting his three guests with an air of paternal affection, he threw himself into one easy-chair, while his wife appropriated that from which the Count had just risen. "Sit down, my son," he said to the latter. "Carabet! put a chair for Miss Hartwright near me. Now, let us make ourselves comfortable and have a good chat. We are not going to discuss secrets, I imagine."

"That is as you wish," replied Santalba.

"How as I wish?" Then turning suddenly towards Florence, he exclaimed, "What's this? You are in great suffering, my daughter. You should be in bed, child. Mr Sebastian, help your cousin to her room."

Florence trembled. She struggled to rise, in obedience to the old man, but a still stronger influence seemed to nail her to her chair; at

the same moment she was conscious of a sharp spasm of pain in her side.

"Miss Hartwright, you are ill. I know it; take my arm," said Madame Masollam, rising.

But the Count quickly interposed, "Let me help you," he said; and seizing Florence's outstretched hand more abruptly than strict politeness warranted, he placed her on a couch, and seated himself beside her.

Madame Masollam bit her lip.

"Sebastian," continued the Count in a low but concentrated tone, "this is no moment for conventionalities. Come here and sit on the other side of your cousin, and hold her hand. Do not let it go without my permission."

"That cuts two ways," said Masollam, with a sneer. "Remember, Miss Hartwright, it was the Count, not I, who told you to give your hand to your cousin. Mr Sebastian, I congratulate you. I have striven for this. The Count has been the only obstacle. As he has just said, this is no moment for conventionalities; at the same time it is I, and not he, who am responsible to Mr Hartwright for his daughter and her future. I think the Count had some idea of leaving to-day, and asking

you both to accompany him. I am afraid, under the circumstances, I must request you to adhere to the promise you made me yesterday, and remain until Mr Hartwright, whom I expect shortly, arrives; and I am sure Miss Hartwright will also see the impropriety of quitting my roof without a chaperon, although, as we are to ignore conventionalities, there may be none in her sitting with her hand locked in that of her betrothed for an indefinite time."

Florence blushed, and hastily withdrew the offending member. In fact both the young people were so utterly paralysed at finding the act so unexpectedly construed into a public announcement of their betrothal, that their first and natural impulse was to repudiate it by unclasping their hands.

"I consider your remarks insulting, both to Miss Hartwright and myself, Mr Masollam," said Sebastian, flushing angrily. "My cousin is of age; I am her near relative, and am perfectly ready to bear the whole responsibility with her father of taking her to him, if she is willing to accompany me."

"I pass over your heated and disrespectful

language, young man," retorted Masollam, "in consideration of your youth and inexperience. I cannot interfere with your decision to leave to-day; but," he added, after a pause, during which he remained with his hands shading his eyes, "I can with your leaving; and," he continued, turning sharply on Santalba, "I shall do so, unless you at once write a telegram to Amina and her mother to return here at once. Give me that, and I release you."

"Release me!" exclaimed the Count.

"Yes; for you at least know, if this young man does not, that it rests with me now whether Miss Hartwright will be able to travel to-day or not. And you also know that you will not leave without her."

"I know more than that," exclaimed the Count, suddenly springing to his feet, and advancing towards Masollam with a gesture so menacing, that the old man seemed to shrivel in his chair from terror lest personal violence should be offered to him. The alarm by which for a moment he was invaded was, like all his other emotions, far more intense than can be realised by those whose dense

natures close them to nervous and unreasoning fear, though a panic is a phenomenon which, as we all know, when it affects a mass of people, overcomes, by its magnetic impulse, the densest among them. In a hyper-sensitised nature like Masollam's, unable to oppose any resistance to the overpowering rush of forces projected into it by one to whose influence it had been rendered susceptible by the habit of years, the sensation of vague apprehension became almost intolerable. After a desperate effort to encounter with his rapidly dimming eyes, Santalba's flashing gaze, Masollam allowed the lids to drop over them, while the tremor of his lip, and the growing pallor of his complexion, betrayed the moral anguish he was suffering. Like a man groping in the dark, he extended both hands, one of which was promptly seized by Madame Masollam, who made a sign to her brother, which he instantly obeyed, to take the other. Both at the same time approached their chairs on either side of the old man, and slightly lifted his arms, until, obeying the direction thus given, Masollam rose from his seat, and as he did so his cheeks slowly coloured, his eyes

opened, his countenance regained its serenity, and his tall imposing figure, venerable aspect, and flowing beard, reminded Sebastian of Moses presiding over the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites; and he remembered on that occasion how it is recorded that —"When Moses held up his hand Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed;" for which reason it is further stated that "Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side;" and he wondered whether similar influences were now at work, and whether Carabet and his sister, by performing the functions of Aaron and Hur, were securing a victory for him whom they were thus supporting. This reflection impressed itself upon him so forcibly, that he instinctively felt that he and his cousin should range themselves by the side of the Count; and as he rose, Florence followed his example, apparently under the same impulse. While all this was taking place, which takes some time to narrate, Santalba had never faltered in his speech.

"I know more than that," he continued,

and the outstretched arm with which he emphasised each point of his denunciation needed no extraneous support; every motion was instinct with nervous vigour, and his tones vibrated under the force of his concentrated energy. "I know that you, chosen for a great work, have been false to the divine commission; that you have sold the divine gifts for gold; that you have polluted the divine love with lust; that, to attain your own personal and unholy ends, you have violated the divine instinct within you, and have outraged and defiled the principle you were charged to hold sacred. As the devil's flunky you retain the divine livery, and in that holy garb have deceived me into lending you that aid, moral and financial, which enabled you to obtain a footing in this house, by means of which you hoped to accomplish your vile and selfish purposes. To substitute her whom you call your daughter, for this woman whom you call your wife; to obtain, by a fraudulent profession of high and lofty aims, possession of this young man's wealth. Silence! I command you," for at this point Masollam had so far regained courage and composure, that

he made a very decided effort to interrupt the Count, which the latter could only check by clenching his outstretched hand, thus again making appeal to his physical cowardice. "Once sunk from your high estate, the *descensus Averni* was easy. The step from traitor to impostor was then a necessary one, and hypocrisy, lying, and swindling became your trade. That the scales have been so long in falling from my eyes, is due to the fact that for some years past you have avoided coming into close contact with me. How far I consent to leave you now in peace will depend upon the manner in which you conduct yourself after this warning. You have in your own sensations at this moment the best evidence that you are the mere wreck of what you once were. And I defy alike your malice and your vengeance. Now, do you still dare to resist me, and require the telegram you have demanded from me?"

Masollam, raising himself to his full height, and extending his arms above his head, exclaimed in a loud hollow voice, "I do!" and as he spoke he sank in a heap on the floor, nearly bearing with him his two supporters,

who made a vigorous attempt to check the suddenness of the collapse. Florence impulsively rushed to his assistance, and before the Count could interpose, Madame Masollam, apparently overcome by the violence of her feelings, had thrown herself into the girl's arms. To Sebastian's astonishment, instead of supporting the fainting form, his cousin no sooner found herself thus encumbered, than she made a violent effort to disentangle herself, in which she was energetically assisted by Santalba, who led her staggering to the couch; while Madame Masollam, making what seemed a miraculously rapid recovery, leant over to her brother and whispered, "I have struck the last blow. You chafe his hands, while I rub his temples," and under these united ministrations, Masollam was gradually restored to consciousness. Meantime the Count had rung the bell, and on the appearance of Juan, directed him at once to assist Mr Masollam to his room.

"This poor child's generous impulse," said Santalba to Sebastian when the three were alone, "will, I am afraid, enable Masollam to carry out his threat of detaining her. She

will be quite unable to leave to-day, at all events."

"I had been feeling a pain in my side ever since I came into the room," murmured Florence in a low voice; "but when Madame Masollam threw herself upon me, I had to exert myself suddenly to prevent her falling, and it became so sharp that I nearly fainted."

"Thus, you see," remarked the Count, "this attack may be accounted for on grounds which would quite satisfy the medical profession. The action of Miss Hartwright's heart is organically weak. She is often conscious of pain there, and a sudden violent emotion or effort is very apt to increase it. Mr Masollam's nervous attack could be equally rationally explained as the effect of intense cerebral excitement; yet deliberately to produce these results, under the conditions you have witnessed, with a view to a specific purpose, required some knowledge of the method of operation of the forces to which they are primarily due. Hence it is that the consequences of the struggle which has just taken place, are more far-reaching than if they had not been intelligently brought about. And

now," continued the Count, addressing Florence, "you must allow me, Miss Hartwright, to apply a little of that knowledge remedially, and I trust I shall be able in a great measure to neutralise the injury which has been inflicted upon you." But as the Count's treatment differs from any which has yet been recognised by science, I will spare the reader any attempt to describe it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ENEMY RECEIVES A REINFORCEMENT.

THE same afternoon, while Florence Hartwright was lying with closed eyes on the couch in the drawing-room, still somewhat languid and exhausted from the morning's experiences, but nevertheless refreshed by a peaceful slumber, from which she had just awoke, she became aware that her solitude had been invaded, and, looking up, saw to her surprise that the intruder was none other than her own father. The apparition was so sudden and unexpected, that she conld scarcely at first realise that she was not dreaming; then, springing to her feet, she found herself in a moment folded in his arms.

"My dear Florence," was Charles Hart-

wright's first exclamation, "how pale and ill you look! What is the matter?"

"Only a slight attack of my old heart weakness," she replied; "but I am much better now, and shall be all right to-morrow. And after all, it was providential; for had I been well enough to travel, I should have been on my way to London by this time, and should have just missed you. Was it not fortunate?"

"On your way to London! Why, your last letter said nothing about any intention of leaving."

"Oh, a great deal has happened since then; things change with such extraordinary rapidity in this house. Mr Clareville and Miss Masollam have both left it, and the Count, Sebastian, and I were to follow to-day. And then I think we were all going on at once to France, where I should have joined you."

"It is lucky, indeed, that I arrived in time to put a stop to such mad plans. I am not surprised at you, for you never think of such things; but I am at the Count. He, at least, is man of the world enough to have some regard to the ordinary decencies and pro-

prieties of life. If Miss Masollam has so little respect as to go off alone with Mr Clareville, it is *raison de plus* why you should not think of joining them."

"But she did not go off alone, papa; she went with her mother."

"You said Mr Clareville and Miss Masollam had left: you did not mention Madame Masollam."

"But Madame Masollam is not her mother," pursued Florence; and observing her father's amazed and bewildered expression, she continued, "it is a most extraordinary story. I don't yet know all the ins and outs of it; but it seems that the first thing Sebastian discovered on his arrival here was that Carabet, the curiosity-dealer, had an Eastern lady imprisoned in his house, where she had been for some months, exciting great curiosity in the minds of the servants and neighbours: that the first thing the Masollams did on reaching Tongsley, even before they came here, was to visit her; and that shortly after you had all left, they secretly removed her here in the middle of the night, where they have kept her concealed. They could do this,

you know, because all their own servants were in their confidence. It seems that both the Count and Amina knew it, and that the latter used often to visit her, without having the least idea it was her own mother, until, owing to a great rupture between the Masollams and the Count—the exact cause and nature of which it would be too long and complicated to explain, indeed I don't know that I understand it thoroughly myself—the whole truth came out, and the Count managed the escape of Amina and her mother and Mr Clareville secretly the night before last, for the Masollams would never have consented to it. Indeed Sebastian hinted something about old Masollam wanting to marry Amina. She is no relation to him, it seems; but wouldn't it have been quite too horrid? I am sure I don't wonder that she ran away, especially as she is in love with Mr Clareville, who of course was only too glad to be her escort. I looked out of my window, and saw them tramp off down the approach to where the carriage was waiting for them outside the gate. I was awfully anxious, you know, to see what Amina's

mother was like, but it was too dark. So, you see, my going away would not have been the least improper after all, for the Count and Sebastian would have been quite protection enough up to London, and, after that, Amina's mother would have been my chaperon."

The rapidity with which this strange narrative was poured by Florence into her father's ears, so completely bewildered that gentleman, that it was some moments before he could seize the new situation thus presented to him sufficiently to reply. At last he said—

"So that was the woman I saw in the cab this morning with Clareville and Miss Masollam; is that the only name you know her by? Is she anything else besides Amina's mother? Mrs Anybody, for instance?"

Florence had never thought of this, and hesitated. "No," she said at last, "I don't know whether she is Mrs Anybody or not. I haven't the least idea who she is, or where she comes from. At least I know she comes from somewhere in the East; but I forgot to ask Sebastian anything more, and I never saw Amina after she had made the discovery."

"Humph!" grunted Charles Hartwright;

" but yet you feel certain that she would make a perfectly satisfactory chaperon. It seems to me that an unknown female from the East is not just the kind of person that I should wish you to go travelling about Europe with ; at all events, until I know something more about her."

"The Count is sure to know, and he would never have consented to it had he not been satisfied that it was all right. Does he know that you have arrived, papa ? "

"I don't suppose he does. I told Sharp, who let me in, to tell Mr Masollam I had come."

At this moment the door opened, and the domestic in question appeared.

"Mr Masollam is extremely sorry, sir, that he is too unwell to leave his room. He bids me say that he hopes you will excuse him from trying to make the effort to come downstairs, and do him the favour to step up and see him."

"Shamming, as usual, I suppose, and trying to lord it over every one," grumbled Hartwright, apparently hesitating whether he should accept the invitation.

"No, indeed, papa; this time, I can assure you, he really is ill. I saw him this morning, when he was seized with a sudden attack, and fell to the ground almost unconscious."

"Well, child, stay here quietly till I come back; trust me for probing the strange proceedings of these people to the bottom."

But Florence did not think it incumbent on her to display the virtue of filial obedience in this instance; and no sooner was her father's back turned than she slipped off to the sanctum of the Count. She found him closeted with Sebastian.

"Papa has come," she said; and she rapidly narrated what had passed between them.

"In this event," said the Count, turning to Sebastian, and apparently continuing the conversation which Florence's appearance had interrupted, "you observe an illustration of what I was just saying. We poor finite human beings think we are playing the game of life ourselves; but we are nothing but the pawns on the terrestrial chessboard, and even the invisible hands that move us are but the instruments of intelligence where the force is

generated, under the impulsion of which hands and pawns alike are moved."

"And yet the analogy is not complete," returned Sebastian; "for we, whom you call the pawns, and the invisible beings which act upon us, whom you call the hands, differ in this respect from actual pawns and hands, that we are thinking and feeling matter, with minds and wills of our own, while they are inert matter."

"With minds and wills, yes; of our own, in the sense of absolute freedom, no. We cannot resist obedience to impulse, even though we are permitted the sense of directing our choice as between conflicting impulses. And in proportion as the intelligence of the human pieces, who are thus controlled and played with, are developed, do they begin to understand the rules of the game, and the meaning of the players, and thus become able to co-operate intelligently with them. Of course all analogies are imperfect, and can only be used to convey an illustration of an idea that is not susceptible of any definite analysis in words; but it would be more perfect if we suppose the game played, as it sometimes is,

on a lawn, with men and women for pieces. And imagine that, on the one side, the pieces made moves of their own, or resisted the will of the player, hesitating and discussing its merits in the hearing of the other side; who, perfectly trained and intelligent, instantly responded to the slightest touch."

"From which I suppose you mean," said Sebastian, "that, in bringing Mr Hartwright here at this exact juncture, the adversary has made a new move."

"That is exactly what I mean; and you observe how intensely interesting life becomes, when it resolves itself into one long and fierce combat between the intelligences and their forces that make for the right, and those which are ranged to resist it. The man who is absorbed in his own personal interests and ambitions knows nothing of it; for he does not recognise any forces opposed to him outside the sphere of his own mundane hopes and fears. He struggles blindly with events, as the sailor does with the elements, caring only for his own cargo, and making only for his port of destination. But he who, divested of all personal inclination, enrols

himself in this mortal life in the host of those who, from unseen realms, are combating for the universal good, begins soon to be conscious that there are rival influences at work, who use the base passions of earthly men with which to frustrate that grand endeavour; and they finally get to perceive a certain method in the operations of both sides, and to recognise the fact that the success of the side on which they are fighting, must depend upon the strength of the altruistic sentiment which animates the combatants; for in proportion to that depends, in its turn, their receptivity to the divine impulse under which they combat. Hence it often happens that we who are engaged intelligently in this strange warfare, find ourselves impelled to adopt a course of action, the ultimate bearing of which is concealed from us. Often it is even difficult for us to justify our acts to ourselves on any principle of common-sense; often we really believe we are struggling to accomplish a purpose, which, after we have failed, we find did in fact achieve another and altogether different result, the meaning of which now becomes clear, though it would have been im-

possible of achievement, except under the mask of another design,—in other words, we are constantly making feints to deceive the enemy, and are ourselves kept in ignorance at the time that they are feints; but as we come in the course of a long experience to be more familiar with the divine tactics, and to recognise the marvellous operation of the laws which govern the forces at work on both sides, we become overwhelmed at the magnitude of the struggle; and as our lives become wholly devoted to it, we recognise in every minute detail which affects them, its bearing upon the vast issues at stake, and are at once crushed by a sense of our own insignificance, and uplifted by the stupendous consideration that no one is too insignificant to affect, by his own personal effort, the destiny of that whole human race of which he forms a minute fractional part." After a pause, during which the Count seemed buried in thought, and his listeners remained silent, he resumed: "And now to apply these considerations to the matter in hand. This human battle-field that I have been describing is like a kaleidoscope; each moment its aspect changes, and we have

an entirely new set of combinations to deal with. We can only meet them by watching narrowly the indications presented by events as they transpire; by a rigid exclusion of personal desire and inclination; and by excessive promptitude in action, when we become aware what the divine will in regard to that action is to be."

"It is just that point," said Sebastian, "that puzzles me. Of course, so long as you are with me to direct me, I can follow your guidance; but when I am alone, how am I to know when I am to trust my own?"

"This is a knowledge," replied Santalba, "which can only be gained by experience. You will constantly, at first, imagine you are following the divine guidance, only to discover that you have been mistaken, that you acted under an impulse, which you imagined at the time to be pure, but which a more rigid analysis will prove to you was mixed; but you must not be discouraged by such mistakes, which can, by some new and unexpected turn of the kaleidoscope, be overruled for good. Better too great recklessness in the effort to do God's will, than too much caution in trying

to be quite sure first that you know what it is. Purity of motive is the essential condition. Courage, coolness, and confidence come with it. By degrees you will discover that when you are on a wrong track in action, you will be conscious of a vague sense of uneasiness and discomfort; instantly take note of it. You may have to hark back, or you may be on the brink of a danger of which this is the warning. Never neglect a moral or physical sensation of any kind. Every emotion, every pain, has its lesson, if you but knew how to learn it. They are so many sign-posts to point the way. Remember, when a man becomes wholly God's, nothing can happen to him in which, if he listens attentively, he cannot hear the divine voice. He will soon find that the perpetual habit of instant obedience to it will give him plenty to do. There is no fear in the case of such an one that time will hang heavy on his hands. In proportion as he piles the work on himself, will it be piled upon him by Him who was the greatest burden-bearer that ever lived, and who still presides over the great work for which He died; but the strength given for each additional burden

is only another word for love; for what is love but potency, and what is that but joy? This is, for the present, what you must do, my children, to get the divine guidance you desire. You must not expect in yourselves infallibility. You will often stumble and fall. Your training must needs be long and painful, but 'covet earnestly the best gifts,' and take courage from this promise, which I am now permitted to make. When you have approved yourselves faithful and valiant soldiers, and passed through the ordeals which are necessary to test your fortitude and fidelity, 'yet I will show unto you a more excellent way.' And now leave me, for the light I am now about to invoke can only shine upon me in solitude."

CHAPTER XXV.

MASOLLAM UNMASKS HIS BATTERIES.

WHEN Sharp entered Masollam's room with the tidings that Charles Hartwright had arrived, Madame, who had never left him since the catastrophe of the morning, uttered an exclamation of triumph. "Ha!" she ejaculated, "that was a providential blow I dealt his daughter at the last moment. Had it not been for that, they would have escaped us."

"And Santalba says my perceptions are blunted," added the old man. "Did I not foretell his coming; and see that, to save the situation, it was necessary, at all hazards, that Florence should be kept from leaving? Has Carabet gone home?"

"Yes; but he will return this evening."

"That is well; we shall need him."

"It is well we sent him before us into this country. He is intelligent, and has been reading the newspapers. He made a suggestion, after the struggle of this morning, which strikes me as important, and he is coming back to discuss it more fully. We shall be better able to judge of its value after we have seen Charles Hartwright. See, here he comes." And as she spoke, Hartwright entered the room.

He bowed stiffly to the lady, and extended his hand coldly to Masollam, who lay extended on his couch, and responded to his salutation with an air of extreme suffering and weariness.

"You must take me as you find me, Mr Hartwright," he said. "I am not good for much, but I rejoice all the more at your arrival, for I have been very uneasy of late about your daughter's health, and had you not appeared, should have taken the liberty to summon you by telegraph. I have been deceived, Mr Hartwright—basely, foully deceived—by the man whom of all others I trusted; for to me he owes his life—ay, and more than his life—and he has repaid me by

the blackest ingratitude. He has stolen my money, he has attacked my honour, and, worse than all, he has betrayed the sacred cause to which he was pledged. You are doubtless surprised to hear me use such language about Santalba, for it is of him that I speak; and possibly in early days, when you and your brother knew him, he was still an honest man — he had not then become versed in those arts of hypocrisy and dissimulation to which I have fallen a victim. He may perchance then have had some regard for truth, some respect for feminine virtue, some generosity of disposition; but he has now, under the specious mask of disinterestedness, become lying, profligate, and avaricious. It was this discovery, when I made it, which caused me to tremble for your daughter—for my own ill health, and my wife's necessary attendance upon me, has made it impossible for us to afford her the necessary protection; and as there is no wickedness of which this man is not capable, I have been feeling keenly during the last few days the danger to which your daughter was exposed, and, in fact, my present suffering is due principally to that anxiety."

Masollam had begun this long tirade with an air of extreme languor, but as his vituperative faculties became excited, and his imagination inflamed, he warmed to his subject; and so forgetful was he of his ailments, in the eloquence of his denunciation, that its effect was somewhat marred by the confirmation it gave to Hartwright's original suspicion, that his invalid airs were assumed. He was agreeably surprised, however, to find Masollam in this indignant and expansive mood: he preferred it to the affectations of manner he assumed when posing as sage or seer, and thought he was more likely to arrive at the truth from Masollam the man, than Masollam the mystic. "Santalba must have trodden frightfully on the old man's corns to make him lie about him like that," was his inward comment; from which it will appear that truth may be extracted from lies more easily than from the bottom of a well. In pursuance of his tactics to learn more, Hartwright changed his manner to one of pleasant cordiality. He drew his chair nearer the couch upon which Masollam was again extended. During his excitement the Oriental had forgotten himself

so far as not merely to sit up, but to take a stride or two across the room. He was now panting again from exhaustion, real or assumed.

"Having reason to change your opinions so absolutely in regard to the trustworthiness of our former friend, my dear sir," said Hartwright, "I can well understand your anxiety in feeling that practically my daughter was left at his mercy. She informs me that Miss Masollam escaped at night from The Turrets, under the escort of Clareville, accompanied by a lady whom she calls her mother. May I ask for an explanation of these strange occurrences, and for information as to the reasons which have led you to form so bad an opinion of Count Santalba?" As he asked this question, the severe and usually imperturbable Madame Masollam, to Hartwright's intense astonishment, burst into a violent fit of weeping.

"She feels what we are talking about," said Masollam, casting a glance of profound compassion upon her whom, following his example, we shall, for the sake of convenience, still call his wife; "but as her knowledge of English

is too limited for her to follow me, I shall speak plainly. Her great suffering, the evidence of which you now see, at the prospect of having to part with her adopted daughter, whom she has regarded from infancy as her own child, to an unknown stranger whom I accidentally discovered to be her real mother only a few months ago, induced me to postpone the duty of making the relationship known. I felt it was a necessity, however, I could not avoid, and that as I was obliged to come to England, it would not be right to leave Amina's mother in the East for an indefinite time, more especially as I had—without making allowance for the terrible blow which it has since proved both to my wife and Amina —rashly promised to restore her daughter to the poor woman without delay. You can form no idea, Mr Hartwright, of the suffering I have endured in consequence. I had to tear up by the roots the lifelong belief that had created an ardent filial love in Amina for my wife; I had violently to wrench apart the natural tie which bound together the two women I loved best in the world, and cause them both the most acute anguish. I say

nothing of my own feelings of losing a daughter's love. For love for an adopted father, when the truth is revealed to her, can never be the same as the love which she, a daughter, has felt for him when she believed he was her real father. These were the reasons which induced me to keep Amina's mother here in seclusion, until I could bear to make the painful revelation. Had I been less conscientious, I should have left her at Damascus. Thus it is, Mr Hartwright, that over-scrupulousness of conscience sometimes leads us into the most painful dilemmas, and exposes us to the most distressing misconstructions. No doubt Santalba will tell you another story; and one of my complaints against him is the malicious way in which he has made use of this sad history to prejudice my daughter—I cannot bear to say my adopted daughter—against me, to such an extent that he actually induced her to fly from me; plotting the whole conspiracy by which she and her mother should be secretly conveyed away from the house in the dead of night, under the escort of his friend Mr Clareville, who, I have reason to believe, cherishes a vile design in regard to her. What

else could one expect from an unprincipled fashionable man about town? He it is whom the once pure Santalba has now chosen as an accomplice in his villany. And if it had not been for your opportune arrival, Mr Hartwright, he would at this moment have conducted your daughter to the den of infamy in which he has secreted—with her lover—her whom I once called mine."

"But Sebastian?" interrupted Hartwright. "You are leaving him out of the question altogether. Do you think he would ever have consented to an arrangement which might have compromised his cousin's reputation? Besides, Amina's mother was with them."

"Amina's mother!" echoed Masollam with a voice of scorn. "Do you know who Amina's mother is? A Druse woman, with no more idea of morality than the beasts of the field. Besides, even if she had, what does she know of the laws and manners and customs of England in regard to marriage? Practically she constitutes no protection of any kind; but you are mistaken in imagining that any sentiment continues to exist between your daughter and her cousin. Santalba has put

an end to all that. All my efforts to bring about the marriage, to accomplish which I kept them together under my roof, have been thwarted by his devilish devices. I positively believe he has made them hate one another."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Hartwright, at last beginning to feel seriously uneasy; for Masollam had only put into more vigorous language the doubts which he had already expressed to his daughter, when he had heard from her own lips the circumstances under which she had proposed to leave The Turrets. "I must see Santalba and Sebastian in regard to this matter," he continued. "I confess my last interview with the former before my departure was very unsatisfactory. He admitted having been the means of preventing the proposed visit of my daughter and her cousin to Clareville Court, where I have no doubt the marriage might have been arranged."

"Yes," interrupted Masollam; "and then, when, to remedy matters, I persuade Miss Hartwright to stay here, he uses his influence in some unaccountable way to set her against Sebastian."

"That seems so utterly incredible that noth-

ing short of hearing it from Florence's own lips will satisfy me of its truth."

"That is precisely the evidence I should most wish you to have. Would you like to send for her? I parted with the dear child this morning under somewhat distressing circumstances, and fear that the agitation may have affected her health. I think a little visit to our room might be really beneficial to her. My wife has a wonderful power of healing in cases of such ailments."

"No," said Hartwright; "I would rather see her alone." And he rose to leave.

"You will let us see you again this evening to hear the result, I hope?"

"If you wish it."

"My dear Mr Hartwright, it is a matter of the deepest importance to us both. I do not want to trouble you with my own affairs; but in some respects our interests are common, and you will not, I am sure, refuse me your assistance in rescuing Amina and her mother from the trap into which they have fallen. At what hour may I expect you?"

"I will give you notice of my visit, when I hope I may find you in less suffering," replied

Hartwright, with an almost imperceptible sneer, as he took his departure.

"Provided always that Florence does not tell her father that her determination to give up her love for her cousin was in obedience to instructions received from us," said Masollam, glancing uneasily at Madame, as the door closed behind their visitor.

"There is no fear of that. Whatever she may once have done, she does it now of her own free will. Besides, it was really done under the Count's influence and Amina's, as much as under ours."

"You did well, Tigranuhe, to cry when you did. I was very much puzzled to know what story to tell, till you gave me that hint."

Madame rose, and seating herself by his side took his hand.

"There was truth in my tears; I did not force them," she said softly. "You will never think again of putting Amina in my place," and she coaxingly stroked his long grey hair.

"No, darling; it was a dream. But why did you suggest your own abdication?"

"To wake you from it. It is madness to

think that we can ever be separated. You are mine—mine for ever."

"Yes," he repeated slowly; "yours for ever."

"It was a dream that gave rise to serious complications," she went on. "You should never have dreamt it, and forced me to wake you so rudely."

"No," he echoed again; "I should never have dreamt it."

"It exposed you to great combat; her instincts were so different from mine, and they jarred. And you were in constant suffering, and so was I. Now there is no one to come between us. It will be easier for us both."

His lips seemed again mechanically to repeat her last words, but no sound issued from them. She passed her hand once more softly over the flowing locks, and then gently withdrew it. He had fallen asleep.

Hartwright found Florence where he had left her. She had returned but the moment before from her interview with Santalba, and was still under the impression of the glowing words to which she had listened. Never had her resolutions been more confirmed, her aspirations more stimulated, or the consciousness of

the change which a few short weeks had operated within her been more profound, than at the moment when her father again stood by her side. He had during the interval been subjected to a very different influence from that, the benign effects of which his daughter was then feeling.

While she had been assimilating into her moral system the life-giving essences of lofty and ennobling impulses, he had been absorbing into his, the venom that had gushed in such copious torrents from the lips of Masollam. His expression had become more sullen, his eye more suspicious, his voice more harsh.

"Where is Sebastian?" he asked. "He must have heard by this time that I was in the house. Keeping out of the way, I suppose, because he is afraid I shall call him to account."

"I don't think that is the reason, papa," replied Florence, gently. "He thinks you are with Mr Masollam. No doubt he will come presently. He has nothing to be afraid of."

"Nor you either, it seems, from the way you were prepared to risk your reputation with

him. I understand you have given up all hope of becoming his wife," and he significantly emphasised the last word.

There was such an absolute brutality in this insinuation, coming, as it did, from the lips of her own father, that Florence was too much shocked and distressed to speak. As she fixed her horror-stricken gaze upon him, he softened under it, and muttered something about not being quite himself.

"The fact is," he continued, with a sort of shambling attempt at an apology, "that old brute, Masollam, seems to have so muddled me with his lies and scandals that I say things I don't mean to. Don't mind me, child. I meant nothing; but I want to know how matters stand between yourself and your cousin."

"We shall always love each other as brother and sister. He will always be my dearest friend, but he can never be more than that. We have had an explanation, and thoroughly understand each other. He is now the last man in the world I would marry."

Hartwright's brow grew black, and his voice trembled with passion, as he exclaimed, in a loud tone—

"You never came to that resolution of your own free will, girl! This is that villain Santalba's doing!"

"Here he is to answer for himself, Mr Hartwright," said the Count, advancing with Sebastian; "vent as much of your fury as you like upon me, but spare your daughter, unless you desire to be her murderer. In her present state of health you have it in your power to be guilty of a great crime. Sebastian," he continued, with an air of calm authority, "will you take your cousin to her room?"

"Who are you, sir?" exclaimed Hartwright fiercely, exasperated beyond measure, "to order my daughter about in this way in my presence. Don't leave the room, child; I command you to stay," for Florence was already on her cousin's arm, and continued moving slowly away.

Charles Hartwright sprang forward to bar her farther progress; and, to do so more effectually, seized her with some violence. She withdrew her arm from her cousin, looked into her father's face with brimming eyes, murmured, "Oh, papa, I think you have

killed me," and Hartwright found himself supporting her fainting frame.

Sobered by the sudden consequence of his violence, and embarrassed by his burden, Hartwright glanced for help at the Count and his nephew, as he carried his daughter, now quite unconscious, back to the couch. "My God!" he ejaculated, appalled at her pallor, as he laid his hand on her heart, "what have I done?" Then, as neither the Count nor Sebastian spoke or stirred, he called out, "Help, gentlemen, help! Can you stand there and see her die without a movement?"

"Sebastian," said the Count, in the same calm authoritative tone in which he had before spoken, "will you carry Miss Hartwright to her room?—unless, indeed, her father again interferes violently to prevent you." Hartwright was too panic-stricken to offer any further opposition, and the Count continued: "And now, Mr Hartwright, the villain Santalba is still here to answer your questions; but I think it right to warn you that your daughter needs his immediate attention, and that if you detain him he cannot answer for her life. It may give you confidence to know that he has had

occasion to study medicine, and can produce his diploma if required."

"Go to her, then, in God's name. A curse seems to have rested on me and mine ever since these people entered my doors," he muttered to himself as the Count left the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE AND A HOSTAGE.

HARTWRIGHT had too little confidence in the Count's medical skill to rest satisfied with leaving his daughter in his hands, and determined immediately to ride into Tongsley himself, in search of a doctor. It afforded him a good excuse to escape from his own reflections, and from a house towards the inmates of which he entertained such strong feelings of dislike and suspicion. On his way he met Carabet; but as he was riding fast, and his mind was completely absorbed by the tumult of emotion which had been excited by his recent interview with his daughter and Santalba, he passed him without notice. It was far otherwise with Carabet, who found ample matter for conjecture in the reflection that, since he

had left The Turrets a few hours before, its owner had arrived, and had already found occasion, owing to some unknown event which had occurred there, to hurry into town on horseback at a late hour in the day. He did not fail to communicate this piece of intelligence to Masollam and his sister, on entering the room in which they were seated together.

"Find out at once from Sharp what has happened," said Masollam. "He can easily get at it from Miss Hartwright's maid, if he does not know himself."

It turned out, in fact, that Sharp did know; for being an old family servant, Hartwright had no need for reticence, and indeed, while his horse was being saddled, had put several questions to the butler, with a view of eliciting information as to the habits of the household, and the course of events during his absence, and had incidentally remarked that his reason for hurrying into town was to summon the doctor, in consequence of Miss Hartwright's sudden illness.

"She must have had a relapse, then," said Madame, "or Hartwright would have mentioned it while he was here."

"Hush! your brother wishes to say something, and his thought is a good one. Speak out, my son," exclaimed Masollam, turning with sudden eagerness to Carabet.

"It is indeed marvellous how events seem working in favour of an idea which I have already discussed with Tigranuhe," replied Carabet. "Did you tell the Master, sister?"

"No; but I approve of it; so you can do so."

"From what she has told me," pursued the curiosity-dealer, in obedience to this injunction, "things seem to have reached such a pass that, unless extreme measures are resorted to, the object of your mission to this country, owing to Count Santalba's interference, will have failed, and he will obtain that complete control of Sebastian Hartwright and his money which, with his aid, you hoped to have gained. Fortunately methods exist in this country which still offer us a chance of success; and although we shall require as an indispensable ally Mr Charles Hartwright, there is no reason why, considering the exceptional position we occupy with regard to this family—of the secret of which he is ignorant—we should not

hold him completely in our power. My idea, then, simply is, that on his return with the doctor, you should suggest to him that, as the cousins refuse to marry each other, he should have Sebastian confined in a lunatic asylum. Indeed the occasion seems most providential. As the visit of the doctor will be to his cousin, there will be nothing to excite Sebastian's suspicion; and after the visit is over, his uncle can draw him out in the doctor's presence in a chat upon the topics upon which he can be specially eloquent, and get him to narrate some of his own experiences. For example, visions that he has seen; voices that he has heard; beliefs that he entertains — as, for instance, that the world has a soul, as well as every individual on it, which, of course, is an insane idea, as every doctor knows that it is quite impossible, on grounds of positive science, that it should have one. The thing won't be so difficult as you might suppose, because a good many people in Tongsley know that he has these extravagant notions, as they call them. It is fortunate they don't suspect what ours are," added Carabet parenthetically, "or we should all be clapped into a madhouse

together. The newspapers first put the idea into my head; and I have been collecting scraps of evidence that might be useful. See here"—and Carabet drew from his pocket a scrap of paper. "I found these verses this morning, when you sent me to summon Santalba here, and he declined to come. He evidently went immediately to call Sebastian, who, in his haste to respond, rushed off, leaving this effusion on his table and the door open; so, seeing it lying there as I passed, I took it, thinking it might come in useful."

Masollam took the paper, glanced over it, lay back for some time with his eyes closed, and then said, turning to Madame, "What do you think of your brother's suggestion, my dear?"

"I have already said I approve, otherwise I would not have allowed him to mention it. And what is more, no time is to be lost. There is a second doctor required, is there not?"

"I am not sure that it is absolutely necessary, but it is safer; but Sebastian need not know he is a doctor. Miss Hartwright's ponies are to be sold. I can send a young medical friend of mine the first thing in the

morning to pretend to buy them; and while he is looking them over, he can have a few words with Sebastian—ask him whether he does not think they sometimes shy at objects that are invisible to us,—anything will do. Then all that is required is a magistrate's warrant, and the thing is done."

"'If it were well done, 'twere well it were done quickly,'" said Masollam, whose varied reading and excellent memory often suggested to him quotations that were thrown away upon his listeners.

It aggravated Madame, who said pettishly, "Please speak in a language I can understand. We have no time to lose."

"That was precisely what I did say. It must be done before ten o'clock to-morrow, or that accursed Santalba will scent mischief in the air. I suppose in the meantime we must allow Charles Hartwright to obtain control of the property."

"I don't exactly know how these things are managed in this country; but it will not be under Santalba's influence, as it is now, and that is always a point gained. Moreover, you have Hartwright's receipt for £2000, which

will make him squeezable to a certain extent, to say nothing of a much more powerful lever which we can apply when it becomes necessary," remarked Madame Masollam, with a look of peculiar significance. "Meantime, as it is necessary that the doctor should not be allowed to leave the house before we have seen him, the Master had better write a note, which you can take, brother. Watch for Hartwright on the road, and give it to him. It will have a good effect in any case, as proving that we are well informed as to his movements."

Masollam signified approval, and in a few moments Carabet started, furnished with the necessary epistle.

"Humph!" growled Hartwright, as it was handed to him half-way between The Turrets and the town; "spied, I see, at every turn. What new move are they up to now?" and he glanced darkly at the retreating figure of Carabet, who had continued on his way without a word after performing his commission. "The doctor said he would follow me in half an hour. I have time to see these people first." After learning from the butler, whom he sent

to make inquiries, that his daughter was better, for he shrank from coming again into contact with Santalba, he repaired to the apartments of the Masollams. He was in a peculiarly susceptible mood to listen to the scheme which was there unfolded to him by the Master. It revenged him, at one stroke, on the Count for his interference, on Sebastian for his stubbornness, and on his daughter for her disobedience; while it had the far greater advantage of relieving him from all further anxiety in regard to his own pecuniary difficulties. For the first time in his intercourse with the Masollams, his suspicions vanished, and he was even conscious of a certain sense of gratitude towards them.

"You know enough, perhaps, of your nephew's peculiar experiences, of which I understand he has made no secret, and of the visionary and fantastic views he holds in regard to them, to be able to draw him out before the doctor without exciting suspicion, I suppose?" asked Masollam.

Hartwright smiled significantly.

"I am not altogether disinterested," continued the old man, still further to confirm

his listener's good opinion of him, and speaking with a certain air of frankness. "I really see a chance now of getting the money back you owe me."

"You have never yet explained why you ever lent it to me."

"Ah, you must ask Santalba that—I am pledged to secrecy. It was one of his infernal devices, into which he inveigled me by false representations, and of which at the time I did not understand the true drift, or I would never have been a party to them. I am not at liberty to say more; but that is the less important, as it has all taken an entirely different development now. All you have to do is to repay me your debt, re-enter your house, which I am ready to vacate in your favour, and thank Providence who sent me to your rescue, though I have achieved it in a very different fashion from the manner originally intended. And now, if I mistake not, you have to make a written request to the doctor to examine your nephew. Here is a scrap of what I suppose he would call his poetry, which may, perhaps, tend to confirm your views in regard to him, and be of some

use to the doctor. I think he will see at once that if it is meant to convey any idea of Sebastian's own experiences, the poor youth must be very mad indeed."

Hartwright took the paper and read as follows :—

"Murmurs of innocence, touches of charm,
Songs of sweet lullaby, lulling the calm,
Mystical movements, thrills of delight,
Spells of enchantment, perfumes of night;

Tender imaginings, love the bright goal,
Whispers of angels stirring the soul,
Flashes of purity, white and intense,
Yearnings unearthly lifting the sense;

Fainting pulsations, spasms of prayer,
Visions of loveliness floating in air,
Ardent aspirings, voices that ring,
Noble ambitions, hopes that upspring;

Wellings of happiness, sobs of desire,
Altars of sacrifice, scorchings of fire,
Bursting of bondages, snapping of cords,
Cries of sharp agony, clashing of swords;

Healing with ointments, soothing with balm,
Pants of prostration, wakings to calm,
Breathings celestial, solemn and deep,
On the All Mother's breast falling asleep."

"Oh, mad, mad, very mad indeed!" exclaimed Hartwright. "That will do capitally.

Who the devil does he mean by the 'All Mother'? But I hear the doctor's gig," and putting the paper in his pocket, he hurried from the room.

"Ah," said Masollam, reflectively, looking after him with a smile of much meaning, "how truly the poet sings—

> "'All the world is mad, insane most miserably,
> And they are most insane who know it not.'"

"There you are again," cried Madame Masollam, impatiently, "pattering to me in an unknown tongue."

"I was just remarking, my dear," replied her husband, "that the most dangerous set of lunatics loose in England just now, are those who have the privilege of putting the harmless ones into asylums."

"Thank God," returned his wife, "we have not got any madhouses in our country yet; but I suppose they will be introduced with the other blessings of Western civilisation."

Notwithstanding the caution which Sebastian had laughingly given Clareville to be wary in narrating his experiences, or alluding to phenomena with which the public were unfamiliar, he was himself so completely off his

guard when, after discussing with his uncle and the doctor the malady of his cousin, they diverged into topics connected with psychical research, that he furnished the medical man with all the evidence he required, — more especially as the latter had reasons for wishing to oblige the owner of The Turrets. Perhaps the rashest thing poor Sebastian said, was that he did not see why, since Balaam's ass spoke, other asses should not. He was thinking of his examiner at the moment, but this, of course, the latter could not know; and the glance which he exchanged with Charles Hartwright informed that gentleman that further investigation was unnecessary.

Carabet's medical friend had even less scruple on the following morning in arriving at the desired conclusion, when, in the character of a would-be purchaser of Florence's ponies, he came to investigate those animals. Half an hour later Charles Hartwright, whose manner towards his nephew had changed to one of affectionate cordiality, invited him to accompany him to Tongsley to assist him with his judgment in the matter of a purchase of some antique coins for a friend. While

Sebastian was engaged in looking over them, Hartwright slipped out, so as to avoid being present at the capture, which was easily effected, under the proper warrant, in the shop of the curiosity-dealer; and an hour afterwards, the unhappy victim, who, seeing the trap into which he had fallen, was too wise to offer any resistance, found himself on his way to London, in charge of two keepers. Relying on the prominence of his position as a member of Parliament, which would attract public attention to the event—convinced of his own sanity, relatively, at all events, to that of his colleagues in the House of Commons, and confident in the skill and devotion of Santalba and Clareville — Sebastian made the journey without any of that perturbation of spirit which, under ordinary circumstances, has so strong a tendency to upset the mental balance of those who are so often victimised under less favourable conditions.

Meanwhile Hartwright, after paying a somewhat lengthy visit to his solicitor, with the view of informing himself as to the proper legal steps which should be taken under the circumstances, returned to The Turrets,

anxious to discover whether his daughter had so far improved in health as to be able to undertake the journey with him to London, where the change in his plans, necessitated by the incident which had just taken place, required his immediate presence. He had, however, been anticipated in his arrival by Carabet, who had lost no time in conveying to the Masollams news of the happy termination of the morning's operations, and the success of the conspiracy, of which he was justly proud, for it had originated in his own fertile brain.

"Now, cunning Count," exclaimed Madame, when she had attentively listened to her brother's recital, "I think we hold a hostage, for which you will gladly exchange Sada and Amina. I suppose," she added, after a pause, addressing her husband, "that when Sebastian's liberty suits us better than his captivity, there will be no difficulty in obtaining it?"

"That must depend largely on his uncle, I imagine," replied Masollam. "He will not willingly relax his hold on Sebastian's money. No doubt, with the weapon we have in our hands against him, of which he knows nothing,

he might ultimately be forced to consent to his nephew's release; but it would cost us a struggle, and involve an alliance with Santalba and Clareville, who would probably prefer to take their own measures, but these we can defeat. In fact, we control the situation. Allied with Hartwright, we can keep Sebastian a prisoner in spite of Santalba; but he must pay us for doing so out of Sebastian's money. Allied with Santalba and the forces at his disposal, we can effect Sebastian's release in spite of Charles Hartwright; but here, again, we must make our terms first. The game is a delicate one, and will require much skill and care in playing. I scarcely feel as though I should be up to it," he added, wearily, and with an apparent effort against an increasing sense of exhaustion.

"It is strange," said Madame, musing, "that Santalba has allowed all this to take place without making a move. He must have given out so much of his own vital energy in trying to save that girl's life, that he has weakened his faculty of inner perception; or else he is contemplating something that we have not foreseen. I confess," she pursued,

moving uneasily in her chair, "I don't like it. There is something going on, I am certain. There, again, I felt it. There is danger, I tell you!" and her voice became shrill. "How is it you cannot sense it?" she continued, turning to Masollam. "Oh, Master, Master, this used not to be so!"

"Give me your hand, and I will try if I can make out anything," responded her husband, feebly. He held her hand for some time, and remained with his eyes closed. "All dark, all dark," he said at length; "I can see nothing."

"Why do you ask him?" whispered Carabet into his sister's ear. "I thought the woman's function now was to lead." A glance of fury was the only reply the curiosity-dealer received to this indiscreet remark.

"What's that he says? what's that he says?" exclaimed Masollam, in a short hurried manner, very unusual to him. "Oh, he hurts me! he hurts me! Tell me what he said."

"Get out of the room, fool!" was Madame Masollam's only response to this; and her brother slunk away.

"Tell me what it was he said, that hurt me so," reiterated the old man, peevishly.

"We have other more important matters to attend to, dear, than the gibberings of that ape," said Madame, soothingly. "Try and collect yourself; you are tired."

"Yes," he echoed, "I am very tired. Oh, it's so hard to try, and try, and not to see; it wearies me so, struggling through this black cloud that gets ever thicker. Can you see nothing?"

"Yes," she said; "I see Santalba. His infernal face haunts me, with its sardonic smile. And I see more. I see that we should not lose a moment in sending for Hartwright, and making him feel that, if he dares to take a step without us, he is lost. The moments are very precious."

"Impossible; I could not see him now. What Carabet said hurt me so much that I could not face him. We should have a severe struggle to bend him to our wills, and I have not strength for it." And Masollam fell into contortions produced by spasms of suffering, about which there could be no possible mistake. Inwardly cursing her brother, Madame

Masollam set to work chafing and rubbing her patient—now his bare feet, now his hands, now his chest, now stroking his head—until she finally succeeded in inducing a restless slumber.

Then, apparently utterly exhausted herself, she poured a few drops of a liquid from a phial into water and drank it. "Oh the precious moments lost! the precious moments lost!" she murmured, as she swayed herself gently to and fro.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ENEMY'S FLANK TURNED AND THE VICTORY WON.

MADAME MASOLLAM'S instincts were so far correct, that the precious moments, the loss of which she was bewailing, Count Santalba was gaining and turning to extremely profitable account. But she was in the wrong in supposing that his inaction in the earlier part of the day had arisen from any decrease in his faculty of intuitive or quickened inner perception. On the contrary, it was in obedience to a very strong impulse of inaction that he restrained his natural indignation and impatience, and allowed matters to take their course—keeping accurately informed in regard to them, however, by the aid of the intelligent Juan, who had followed Hartwright and Sebas-

tian into Tongsley, not disdaining to avail himself of the convenience of the footboard behind. He had been a witness, from an angle of the street which concealed him from observation, of Sebastian's capture; and he had jumped into a cab and returned with the news more than half an hour before Carabet, who was detained a short time longer in his shop, whence he took an omnibus half the way and walked the rest for the sake of economy. As soon as the Count received Juan's report, he went to see Florence, who was sufficiently restored to be reclining on her couch in a dressing-gown.

"I have something very important to tell you, my dear," said the Count, seating himself on a chair by her side, "and you must exert your whole will-force to preserve as absolute a calm as possible while you listen to what I have to say. It is vital to your health, I may even say to your life, as it is to your happiness, that you should consent to what I am about to propose. I promise you beforehand that I am not going to ask you to do anything that it will not give you heartfelt joy to agree to; but I shall have to preface it with

something very painful and distressing—nothing, however, that it is not in your power easily to remedy. God has dealt very lovingly with you, my child. He put a heavy trial upon you; but you bore it bravely. You never flinched from your test when once you understood its purport, and now your reward has come, and come in a manner most unexpected, though in some respects painful." The Count then broke to her as tenderly as he could the news of the event which had befallen her cousin, explaining that her father was but in a limited degree responsible for his share in the matter, having fallen at a moment of irritation into the plot laid for him by the Masollams, who had brought influences to bear upon him which he was unable to resist. In doing so, he explained that they had exhausted all their strength, and he had expressly abstained from interference until they should be thus internally weakened. He had in the meantime been gathering his forces together, and his turn had come to concentrate them upon the father through the instrumentality of the daughter. "At this moment," continued Santalba, "I am about to turn the flank

of the enemy, which I am the better able to do on account of his enfeebled condition; and you form—to speak in military parlance—the key of the new position. That you may appreciate the duty which will be imposed upon you, I must describe what, in so far as you personally are concerned, that new position is. I explained to you the other day why these spiritual battle-fields were kaleidoscopic, in the suddenness and rapidity of the changes which they involved. You will see the force of the simile now. Yesterday you informed your father that you had given up your cousin for ever—or, to use your own words, he was the last man in the world you would ever marry. I now want you to tell him,—and he may be here at any moment—Juan is watching in the front avenue to bring him here, before he has a chance of seeing any one else,—I now want you to tell him that you have since had reason to reconsider that determination, and that you are prepared to marry him, on condition that the ceremony takes place immediately. I will explain to him that, in your present state, a delay which involves uncertainty would be most disastrous. And I will also explain that,

should he not consent, he need not expect you to recover from your present illness. And this is true, my child—for you are dying, more literally than men think possible, of what they call a broken heart. But He who breaks can mend. And the fact that you voluntarily faced a trial for the love of God, which you were conscious was killing you, and never flinched, has opened you to such streams of healing strength, now that the trial is removed, that when once this struggle is over, you will feel stronger and be stronger than you have ever been in your life.

"See," pursued Santalba, "how wonderfully the divine plan evolves for the happiness of those who trust in it sufficiently to act without thought of self! Had you married your cousin for your own sake, and under your own conditions, having made no sacrifice for him, but having, in fact, sacrificed him to your own inclinations, you would, each of you, have been victims through life — he to the tie which bound him to a woman whose selfishness would have repelled his love; and you to the pangs of unrequited affection, which would finally have altogether alienated you from the

man to whom you had been attached. This was what I foresaw, and determined to prevent; for, when you first thought of Sebastian for a husband, Florence, you did not even love him as he deserves to be loved. I always felt that, notwithstanding your disparity of taste and pursuits, which had been artificially induced by your opposite surroundings, you were destined for each other; and although Sebastian's father failed, almost to the end, to see this, his eyes were at the last opened, and his final injunction to me was to do what I thought best in regard to thwarting or promoting your marriage. In this case, as in all others, I could only follow what I felt to be the divine guidance in the matter. So long as I was impelled under that guidance to throw obstacles in the way, I did; at last I perceived that the moment was approaching when the crisis was about to culminate—which, as you know, it would have done, had I not most opportunely given the Masollams an introduction to your father. Following them almost immediately, under that guidance, I offered you the supreme test; and under it I now release you from the resolution you

then made, for the moral necessity which suggested it no longer exists. You now obey, not the impulse of selfish passion, but the call of duty; and if God has left you no other alternative to save the man you love best in the world from incarceration, possibly for life, but that of marrying him, accept thankfully the bliss that He provides for those whose chief happiness it is to place their affections, as you have done, in His keeping."

Florence herself was surprised at the calmness with which she listened to the Count. She wondered that the news of her cousin's arrest, and the part her father had taken in it, should produce so little shock to her nervous system, while the joy that surged into her being at the prospect of so speedy a realisation of her heart's desire, seemed so weighted with a sensation of peace, that she was spared the turmoil and conflict of emotions, which she well knew in former days would have been excited by the events which had taken place, the complications to which they had given rise, and the solution proposed by the Count. She was spared it, because her heart was too full of gratitude to think so much either of herself

or of Sebastian at that moment, as of Him whose hand was thus dealing tenderly with her.

"It seems to me," she said, after a pause, "people don't trust God enough; they only half trust Him. They always want to help Him to arrange their affairs the way they want them arranged themselves."

"That is because they think they have affairs of their own, that are not His affairs. When once we realise that we are mere agents in this world to carry out His will, we cease to have private plans or property, or desires, or ambitions, or even affections. We act as He bids us act, and love as He bids us love. People may say it is not possible to do this, but how many have ever tried? We, who have, know better. We know that when we are filled with His will to the exclusion of our own, and with His love to the exclusion of all others, this thing becomes possible. We are no longer like ships without compasses, obeying the impulse of every varying breeze, and steering, we know not whither, but shape our course under the guidance of that needle of love and wisdom which ever points true to the pole of Deity. But there," said the

Count, rising and going to the window, "comes your father. Your own judgment will doubtless suggest that you make no allusion to your knowledge of the events of the morning, unless he obliges you to do so. Greet him with your new resolution, before he has time to enter upon other topics."

Charles Hartwright entered Florence's room with an air of sullen embarrassment, which was not diminished when he became aware of the presence of Santalba. He suspected, from his immediate summons by his daughter, that the news, the explanation of which he most dreaded, had possibly already reached her; and he came prepared to throw the responsibility upon the doctors, and to refuse to enter into any justification of the share he had taken in the matter. He was somewhat surprised, therefore, at the affectionate smile of greeting with which he was received by Florence, and relieved at the apparent absence in the Count's manner of all recollection of the unpleasant circumstances under which they had last met, or of any indication in it that he was conscious of the events which had since transpired.

"I am so sorry, dear papa, that I have not been able to see you before to-day; but the Count has insisted on my keeping very quiet —and even now he fears that what I am going to tell you may agitate me too much; but indeed it will not. Since I have come to my new determination, my strength seems to be returning in an extraordinary manner; so much so"—and she cast a sly glance at Santalba—"that I thought I would not take the medicine Dr Jones so kindly sent me from Tongsley, until after I had told you all about it; and if you agree, as I am sure you will, I feel convinced that I shall get quite well without having to take it at all."

"I am glad of that, my dear," replied Hartwright, his humour softening as he found things going so pleasantly. "I don't think it will be difficult for me to agree to any proposal you may make which will get you well. I am sure I don't want you to take Dr Jones's medicine, if you can do without it. You gave me a serious fright yesterday, my little girl; and in the agitation of the moment, I fear, I made use of some expressions, Count Santalba, for which I owe you an apology." The Count

bowed. "What I am particularly anxious to know is, how soon you will be able to travel to London; to-morrow, do you think?"

"That entirely depends, papa. I might—of course it would be a good deal of a scramble—but still I think I might, under certain circumstances, supposing the Count agrees, even manage to get off to-night."

"To-night! why, that is pushing matters with a vengeance; but what makes you in such a hurry? Of course it would suit me better."

"I am in a hurry, because I feel that unless I can get away from this house to-night"—Florence paused, and then concluded abruptly—"I shall die in it."

"Good God! what does the girl mean? What difference can one night make?"

"Impressions like this on the part of a patient are not to be trifled with," said Santalba; "I think even Dr Jones would admit that. It is astonishing what a number of invalids commit a species of moral suicide by making up their minds that they are going to die—just as cholera may be induced by fear, you know."

"I thought that they had discovered that

cholera was produced by some small insect—bacilli, I think, they call them."

"No doubt; but doesn't it strike you that a man must be rather insane, Mr Hartwright, who can maintain that you can generate insects by being afraid of them? Just think what you would get to if you carried out this theory: love, hate, revenge, avarice, would all have their appropriate microbes; and every time you indulged in any of these passions, you might be producing a whole crop of them. As for madness itself, it must breed nothing but insects!"

Hartwright shuffled uneasily in his chair. He did not know whether the Count's allusion to insanity was accidental or designed; and there was a covert irony in the tone of the remark which was distinctly unpleasant, as it suggested the disagreeable reflection that he was at that moment generating insects which might correspond to his desire to appropriate Sebastian's money. He therefore hurriedly got back to the matter in hand.

"Well, Florence, of course if it is to save your life, I shall not hesitate to comply with your wish to start to-night."

"Yes, papa; but I can only do so on one condition, and that is the thing I sent for you to tell you about. I have been thinking very seriously over your disappointment at what I said yesterday about Sebastian. In fact, you remember my refusal to consent to your wishes in the matter was the indirect cause of the attack which, had it not been for our friend here"—and she looked at the Count—"would, I believe, have been fatal. I have come to the conclusion that I should be wrong to adhere to that resolution any longer; and I am confirmed in it, because the Count assures me that my marriage to the only man in the world I ever loved with my whole heart, is the only chance left me for life. Since I heard you talking about insects killing people, I can understand this better. If a bacillus can kill, I can quite see how a Sebastian could cure. At any rate, that is the remedy the Count prescribes, and that is the only remedy I intend to try. Aren't you glad, papa?"

The air of ingenuous simplicity with which Florence terminated her speech by this inno-

cent little remark, formed so strong a contrast with the dismay, almost amounting to terror, depicted on Hartwright's countenance, that the Count was compelled to turn to the window, to conceal the smile he was utterly unable to restrain.

"Really, Florence," her father at last stammered, "this change is so sudden, so unexpected,—so much has happened since yesterday—ahem—of a somewhat painful character; Sebastian, you know, was obliged suddenly to hurry off to London."

"Hurry off to London! and without saying good-bye to me!" interrupted Florence.

Santalba rose, and laying his hand on Hartwright's shoulder, who was too much embarrassed to know how to meet his daughter's ejaculation, he said: "Charles Hartwright, we were old friends, though events have estranged us lately. Let us talk over this matter together in private, and you will find that there is no reason why we should not remain old friends still. Let us leave Florence to take a little rest. She will need all she can get, if she is to travel to-night."

Hartwright, thankful for the diversion, silently rose, and followed the Count to his own old smoking-den.

"I am accurately informed," said Santalba, when they were seated, "of everything that has occurred this morning, not because I desired to spy upon you, but because it was necessary in your own interests, and those of your daughter and nephew, that you should be rescued with as little delay as possible from the trap which had been so skilfully prepared for you by the Masollams. So far as the past is concerned, and my share in it, I must ask you to be satisfied with my assurance that, if I had known what I know now in regard to the entire change which a few short years have operated in the character and motives of Mr Masollam, I would sooner have cut off my right hand than have been the means of introducing him to you. For reasons which I now fully appreciate, but with which it is unnecessary to trouble you, that knowledge was withheld from me. When it was revealed, I found myself in the presence of dangers and complications, involving the lives and happiness of certain members of your family, which I could

only meet as I have done. Why I could not meet them otherwise, it is needless to ask. Suffice it to say that matters have now been brought to the point where it rests with you to free yourself from a yoke which you will find worse than slavery. Once allow Masollam to get you thoroughly into his power, and he will hold you and yours with a grip to which that of the Old Man of the Sea was mere child's play. By the marriage, which you have yourself so much desired, of Sebastian with your daughter, the way of escape lies open to you; but it must be accomplished with all possible rapidity, or new complications may arise, which may involve you in legal proceedings disastrous to your reputation. You know, considering the vast pecuniary interest at stake, the events of this morning would not bear publicity. Believe me, for your own sake, as well as for your daughter's, not a moment must be lost in securing Sebastian's release. Florence used no figure of speech when she said her life depended on her union with her cousin. She will simply pine to death now, if she is deprived of the vital elements her nature craves, and which one

organism only can supply. You have heard of the transfusion of blood from the veins of one to those of another, saving life; think you there is no subtler substance, call it essence if you will, which can be interchanged with equal, ay, far greater advantage?"

"Why did you let matters get to this point?" said Hartwright, bitterly. "If she had only said yesterday what she said to-day, I should have been spared this—yes, I may as well admit it to you, for I admit it to myself—this crime."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Santalba, with a sigh of relief. "If you see it in that light—which, indeed, is the only true one—the day is won. The reason why I let matters get to this point, and could not interfere to change Florence's resolution yesterday, was because then the day would have been lost. I will tell you why, but it will sound mad enough for Dr Jones's certificate, and be incomprehensible to you. It was only this morning that Florence's internal, or spiritual, or essential, or subtler material conditions—call them what you will—completed the change which

will enable her to assimilate as a healing infusion those elements which she can derive as a remedial agent from her cousin. Had she altered her resolution before the change was completed, she would have arrested it, and those same elements would have operated in her as a slow poison. There! you wanted the reason, and I have given it to you. I regret that it is impossible for me to furnish you with faculties to understand it. And perhaps it is just as well that the world, and those who doctor it, should remain in ignorance a little longer; for if people had the least idea of the number of devoted wives who kill their husbands in blissful ignorance, and of exemplary husbands who prematurely send their wives into other, and, let us hope, higher conditions, they would be so horror-stricken and alarmed, that, unless the knowledge of the remedy for so unfortunate a condition of things was equally widespread, society would be convulsed, and possibly revolutionised to no purpose."

"All sounds very like bosh," said Hartwright, gloomily. "At any rate, I am not going to attempt to argue about assertions which admit

of no proof. I will accept this much, that the sooner my daughter is married to her cousin the better; and to that end not a moment must be lost in effecting his release. I am with you there. I shall not go near the Masollams again. I will take your word for his being an old scoundrel; I never thought otherwise, and should never have trusted him had it not been for you. You can go and tell Florence to make her preparations, while I make mine; and the first is to send a despatch to the doctor of the asylum, telling him it is a mistake, and that he must hold his hand till my arrival."

And all this time Masollam was lying on the couch in his room asleep, and his wife was swaying to and fro, watching him and crooning, "Oh the precious moments lost! the precious moments lost!"

PART II.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MANSION OF A DRUSE CHIEFTAIN IN SYRIA.

THERE is no wilder or more romantic scenery to be found in Syria than in that highland region which formed the frontier districts of ancient Palestine on its northern borders. It was probably owing to the rugged and inaccessible nature of the country that the Jews failed to enter fully into their inheritance in this direction, and allowed themselves to be checked in the march of conquest by the precipitous gorges of the Leontes and the lofty range of the Lebanon. Modern investigation has failed to fix with absolute precision the exact boundary which divided the tribes of Asher and Naphtali from their Phœnician neighbours; but there can be no doubt that it included within its limits a tract of country

unsurpassed by any other part of Palestine in the grandeur of its scenic features, and, what was of more importance in those days, in its capabilities of defence. Evidences of this are to be found at the present day in the traces of fortresses on commanding hill-tops, where gigantic blocks of stone, of almost cyclopean dimensions, piled one above the other without cement, bear traces of the extreme antiquity of their origin, and contrast with the more modern remains of castles and forts erected by the Crusaders, some of which are still to be found in a relatively perfect state of preservation. Although the general aspect of the country is rugged and barren, there is a sufficient amount of water in some of the valleys to irrigate gardens, where orange, lemon, pomegranate, fig, almond, and apricot afford in summer their grateful shade, and an abundance of luscious fruit; while extensive olive-groves, with here and there a vineyard, furnish the inhabitants with that revenue, the greater portion of which finds its way into the pockets of rapacious tax-gatherers.

It was in this district that Durzi, the first missionary of the Druse religion in Syria,

established himself about 900 years ago, and began to preach the new faith. Although the mass of the Druse nation now are divided between the mountains of the Lebanon and those of the Jebel Druse, lying to the south-east of Damascus, the shrine on the western slope of Mount Hermon was venerated above all others, for it was the repository of the sacred books until 1838, when, on the conquest of the country by Ibrahim Pasha, they were carried off by the Egyptians. Since then the Druse population in this neighbourhood has diminished, as the special constitution which was granted to the Lebanon after the massacres of 1860, and which guaranteed certain privileges to the inhabitants of "the Mountain," whether Druse or Christian, attracted many of the leading Druse families thither; while others sought refuge from the immediate oppression of the Turkish Government, in the Jebel Druse, the remote position and inaccessible nature of which range has ever enabled its inhabitants successfully to resist by force of arms the direct imposition of Turkish authority. Neither in the Lebanon nor in the Jebel Druse are the Druses liable to military conscription, while

they levy their own taxes, thus escaping the extortion of the tax-gatherer.

The Druse villages not included in these two favoured districts are even in a worse position than their neighbours, whether Moslem or Christian, in so far as liability to military service and taxation are concerned; and my apology for this digression is, that it is with one of these that our story now has to do.

Nestled in a secluded valley lay the village of Teraya, its houses clustering round a cliff about three hundred feet high, from the base of which gushed a copious fountain of sparkling water, that sufficed not merely to supply the domestic necessities of the inhabitants, but to irrigate a plain about a mile long and half a mile wide; thus furnishing them with extensive fruit-gardens, the brilliant green and ample foliage of which formed a refreshing contrast to the rocky hillsides that rose abruptly from their margin. Their luxuriance was in fact suggestive of an amount of wealth which scarcely corresponded with the poverty-stricken aspect of the village itself, and its almost squalid-looking habitations. It consisted of some two

hundred stone huts with flat roofs, the walls daubed with yellow mud, each cottage standing in its own courtyard, which afforded accommodation for all the live stock of the proprietor, the more important animals sharing with his family the common living-room. These habitations were grouped without any regard to order or regularity upon the somewhat steep incline, which sloped from the foot of the cliff to the gardens below, and were dominated by a single mansion, which formed a striking contrast with the dwellings which it overlooked. It was a solid structure built of massive blocks of stone against the precipitous rock at a point where the latter receded, so that advantage had been taken of the ledge thus formed to construct a sort of terrace, upon which a second storey had been erected. Thus it presented the appearance of clambering up the side of the precipice, after a fashion which suggested picturesqueness rather than comfort. The lower storey consisted of spacious apartments, or rather vaults, for the roofs were constructed of stone supported by arches; and here dwelt the family retainers, while accommodation was also found for the domestic animals

in the spacious courtyard by which the whole was enclosed, and which also included granaries and store-rooms and guest-chambers for the retainers of visitors of superior rank. Outside this courtyard there had been levelled, at what must have been a considerable expense, a broad terrace or *meidan*, large enough for those equestrian exercises or *fantasias* in which the Druses delight, and from the edge of which one looked down upon the flat roofs of the village houses. The upper storey, constructed partly upon the roof of the one beneath it, and partly on the ledge of rock in rear, was approached by a staircase of massive stone, which had been built into the walls of the lower storey, across the external face of which it ascended; so that a visitor, to reach the dwelling apartments of the family, is compelled to mount an outside staircase about twenty-five feet high, unprotected by balustrades, thus experiencing the sensation of a fly walking up the side of a house. He is, however, amply repaid for any little nervousness resulting from the effort, by the novelty and picturesqueness of the abode to which he is thus introduced. Stepping from the top of

the staircase into an open, square, paved court, he finds himself in face of a plashing fountain, near which are some orange-trees in tubs. A verandah, supported by light graceful stone columns, runs round three sides of the square, and into it open various apartments, the largest of which, called the Liwán, devoted to the reception of visitors, is surrounded by divans; in its centre is another fountain, while it is lighted by a huge window, ornamented with arabesque designs. Two or three guest-rooms open into this court, while the remaining two sides of the square are devoted to family use. The natural inequalities of the rock in rear are further taken advantage of for domestic purposes; stone cut steps lead up into caves used as store-rooms, while a little jet of cold clear water, gushing from a crevice in the overhanging cliff, is carefully led by stone channels into a hewn reservoir, from which it supplies the fountains, and the wants of the establishment generally. If we are accustomed to Alpine travel, we may push our explorations beyond this crystal spring; but it requires a steady head and sure foot to scale the side of the precipice, by means of

the insufficient and irregular steps which have been cut into the face of the cliff, and by which, after a climb from the fountain of over two hundred feet, we reach the top. Here we find piles of huge hewn stones, some of them heaped in wild confusion, others still standing one or two courses high, as they had been originally placed, thus indicating the walls of an ancient building, or the lines of defence of a former fortress. Here are the circular apertures of bell-shaped cisterns, partly concealed by overgrowth, and forming dangerous man-traps for the unwary explorer, excavated from the living rock, and capable of containing an abundant water-supply for the garrison. And in the neighbouring rocky ledges we observe the carefully hewn entrances into caves, indicating that within are to be found resting-places for the dead,—a conclusion which is confirmed if we crawl in to examine the method of sepulture of a bygone period, where, in some instances, tunnel-shaped repositories received the corpses; or in others, where the bodies were laid in sunken stone troughs, the sides of which, with the arches by which they were roofed, are as

well defined and sharply cut as though they had been the work of yesterday. Sometimes we find several of these subterranean chambers connected by passages, and approached by a mortuary chamber, the massive stone door of which, ornamented with carved devices, is lying in two or three fragments at the side of the entrance. In other cases, the bodies were laid on the bare hillside, in sarcophagi hewn from the living rock, the lids of which still remain *in situ*, to tempt the explorer to reveal, by their removal, the human remains which they have for so many centuries concealed.

It was on a part of the ruin which had evidently been the central keep of the old fortress, for here the stones were piled one above another to a considerable elevation, that two young Druses were seated, intently gazing over a landscape at that moment illumined with all the glory of the setting sun. They were probably too much accustomed to the prospect, and too little sensible of the wonders of nature, to appreciate the singular interest and beauty of its most striking characteristics; but it may be permitted

to us, to whom such sights are not familiar, to pause for an instant to examine it.

To the east, towering above the surrounding country to a height of over 9000 feet, Hermon reared its majestic crest, its furrows, although the summer was already far advanced, still streaked with snow, its noble outline sharply defined in the evening glow, which was already leaving the valley at its base, where the course of the upper Jordan could be traced with its fringe of green, and where groves of trees and rich tracts of cultivation, indicated in places the existence of a settled population. Away to the south lay the plain of the Huleh, where the waters of Merom gleam in the midst of a setting of richest emerald; while, in the distance beyond, the volcanic and copse-covered peaks of the Jebel Heish, with their weird irregular outline, rose high above the rich pasture-lands of Jaulan, the former home of Job. In the foreground a large encampment of Bedouins—their flocks and herds gravitating as evening closed in to their night quarters near the tents—gave life and animation to the scene; while the lofty walls, still standing, of the three crusad-

ing castles of Subeibeh, Hunin, and Belfort, were visible to the east, south, and north—the latter perched upon the edge of a precipice 1800 feet high, at the base of which foams the roaring Litâny. To the extreme north, the Lebanon range of the Jebel Rihan, with an elevation of 6000 feet above the sea, closed a prospect surpassed only in richness of contrast and variety of detail by the grandeur of its more prominent features, and the historical interest of its associations.

As the shadows settled upon the valleys, and the mountain-peaks seemed to glitter more brightly as the last rays of the sun were concentrated upon them, the elder of the two men perched upon the pinnacle of fallen blocks, shading his eyes as he looked westward, gazed, as it seemed for the last time, and then said to his companion—

"There is no use our waiting longer, brother, she cannot arrive to-night; let us hasten back and tell our father that he may dismiss the people."

"When did the letter say that she would come?" asked the younger brother.

"It did not say exactly. It was written

from France, and said she would start at once; but last night father felt they were very near, therefore he sent us up here to look out; and you know, as he said that, she must be near. He is never wrong."

"See," exclaimed the younger man, in his turn peering intently sunwards into the yellow haze, "there is dust. Perhaps it may be our aunt. Let us lose no time waiting to make sure till she comes nearer, but go down and get our horses at once."

With an activity and ease which showed how familiar was every step of the descent to the two young men, they rapidly descended the face of the cliff to the mansion we have already described, where they were received by a venerable-looking old man of unusually dark complexion, with a thoughtful brow, a large gazelle-like eye—as soft and tender as that of a girl—a straight nose, and flexible and almost transparent nostril, and a well-cut mouth, the mild and attractive expression of which was not concealed by a grey moustache and beard, the latter falling almost to his waist.

The dignified repose of his manner, and

absolute serenity of his expression, were well calculated to impose a respect, to which it was evident he was accustomed; for it indicated a will so conscious of its own strength that it feared no opposition, and an intelligence so keen as to relieve its owner from anxiety in respect of its operation. Thus it happened that in the whole Druse nation there was no man more beloved for his personal qualities, more highly considered in council, or more generally venerated than Sheikh Mohanna, who had, ever since the massacre of his brother-in-law and his children, been recognised as the head of the family, and who exercised an influence which extended far beyond the limits of the village in which his residence was situated. He was standing in the court as his two sons entered it.

"We have just been able to discern some dust in the extreme distance, father," said the elder; "and as it was getting so late, we thought it better not to wait, but to ride out at once to see if it be them; and if it is, I will send Kassim back at once with the news."

"You did well, my son; go at once. I will remain prepared, and await your report."

Half an hour had scarcely elapsed before the youths returned, accompanied by a messenger who brought a letter.

"She will arrive to-morrow," said the old man, after reading it; "she is accompanied by my old friend Girius Bey."

"Who is Girius Bey, father?"

"Come into the Liwán, my sons, and I will tell you of some events which happened before you were born, from which you will learn who he is. You have often heard the history of the fatal occurences in which your uncle Sheikh Sâleh lost his life nearly five-and-twenty years ago. You know how we held out against the Maronites for more than a day and a night in this house; how they rolled huge stones down the cliff upon it; how at last we made a sortie, and drove back our assailants, slaying many of them; how in the moment of our supposed victory we found that the enemy had seized the opportunity to make a descent upon the house by the cliff steps, and overpowered the few we had left to guard them; how, hearing the screams of the women and children who were being massacred, we rushed back to the rescue;

how the foe we had driven off then attacked us in rear, and I fell in the struggle, it was supposed mortally wounded, and was carried away by my friends Mahmoud and Nasr-ed-din to the house of Sheikh Hassoun at Hasbeya, where, after a long illness, I recovered, only to hear that my wife and two children had been killed, that your uncle Sheikh Sâleh had fallen covered with wounds, after slaying six of the enemy with his own hands; that his wife Sada, my sister, who it was supposed at first had also been killed, as she could not be found for three days, was alive, as she had been hidden in the secret cave that you know of, but that her two children were among the missing, of whom there were many that have never since been heard of, their little bodies having been thrown into the fields, and become food for the jackals. You have also heard that among the bravest defenders of our homes that day were two strangers who were on a visit, and who, when it was found that they were Christians and foreigners, were spared. One of these was Girius Bey. Five years before, when he was quite a young man, he had claimed our hospitality one stormy

night. When travelling through the country, he had got belated, and lost his way; and on that occasion, a friendship sprang up between us, which has lasted till to day. His official duties at that time obliged him to live in Syria, and no year passed without his coming to spend a month or six weeks with us—visits which I was always glad to return, for we were both engaged in researches into the deep mysteries of nature, and his knowledge of our language and our religion,—which he had acquired by a study of the sacred books, stolen from the Khalwet el Biyad by the Egyptians, —was so profound, that he was probably the only man, not a Druse, who could work himself into a Khalweh without being discovered. We had therefore no secrets from each other, and indeed had come to regard each other as brothers. Upon the occasion of one of my visits to his house, I made the acquaintance of the most learned and remarkable man whom it was ever my fortune to meet. His name was Daoud Effendi Masollam. He was, I think, himself a Jew, but he had married an Armenian, and never alluded to his origin. He was deeply versed in occult science, having

resided in his early youth in India, where, I believe, he was born, and he was in correspondence with a brotherhood to which he belonged in that country, which possessed a deep interest both for Girius Bey and myself, for we detected in it a familiarity with branches of knowledge with which we were already conversant, though they had been perverted by human imagination to suit the conditions of those who sought to magnify their own learning and importance. It was not long before Daoud Effendi, who was a man of purest aspirations, perceived this, and he became the teacher of a system which had for its object rather the improvement of the material conditions which affect the terrestrial universe in which we live, than the preparation of separate personalities for another state of existence. With this effort my friend Girius associated himself enthusiastically. I, however, felt that, as a Druse Uwahid, I had different duties, and, while cordially sympathising in his attempt, confined myself to my own sphere of influence and operations. It was about this time that Girius Bey arrived one night at Teraya, with a friend, also a foreigner, whom I had never

seen before, and whose acquaintance I had scarcely time to make, before the attack to which I have alluded took place. From that day to this I have never seen my old friend ; but you remember that less than a year ago a venerable and learned man paid us a visit here, and told me that his reason for coming was to inform me that he had been able to discover, by the exercise of the occult gifts which he possessed, that my niece Amina, whom it was supposed had been murdered on the night of the attack, was still alive, and that if I would confide to him my sister Sada, he would take her to Amina. That man was my old acquaintance Daoud Effendi Masollam. I asked him whether it would not be possible to bring the girl here ; but he said that those who had adopted her as their daughter, refused to believe that her mother was living, and that to obtain possession of her, it was necessary that your aunt should go in person to claim her. I then asked him whether Girius Bey was living, and whether he knew of the existence of Amina. He replied that Girius was indeed alive, but having left Teraya on that fatal night under the firm conviction that both Sada and I had

fallen victims to the bullets of our enemies, he had never sought to communicate with me since. And he showed me a letter from Girius in answer to one from himself, expressing his pleasure at hearing of my being still alive, his approval of Daoud Effendi's project of taking Sada to Europe, and sending me brotherly greetings. This decided me; and the next morning Sada, who was eager to start, took her departure. Since then I have been a prey to the most acute anxiety, for although Sada promised to write she has never done so; nor could I, when I made a trip to Damascus the other day, for the express purpose of seeking information, obtain any at the former residence of Daoud Effendi. I was unable to write to Girius Bey, as unfortunately I did not think of getting his address from Daoud. Judge therefore of my delight at receiving, a fortnight ago, a letter from my sister saying that she was on the point of starting with her daughter on her return home; and of the still greater pleasure I feel now at learning that they are coming under the escort of my old and valued friend Girius Bey."

"Is our cousin married?" inquired Kassim,

"She must be three or four years older than I am."

"You must restrain your curiosity, my son, till she is here to answer for herself; I know nothing beyond what I have told you."

The old man placed a hand affectionately on the shoulder of each of his stalwart sons. "I should be ungrateful with such boys," he continued, "to talk of a desolate old age; and yet, first to lose your dear mother, and then my cherished sister, seemed hard. She is coming back to me," he murmured, "not in darkness as she went, but in the radiance of a bright light, and it emanates from one who walks by her side. Oh happiness more than I deserve, who have dared to doubt His promise."

CHAPTER II.

SHEIKH MOHANNA CELEBRATES AN AUSPICIOUS FAMILY EVENT.

Among the various offices and outhouses contained in the lower court of the Druse mansion, or rather castle, which I have already described, was one large vaulted chamber standing by itself, the floor of which was matted, while round its three sides were spread carpets; those at what appeared the seat of honour being also furnished with cushions. This was the Manzil or village council chamber, and here on the following day was seated the Sheikh Mohanna, with a son on each side of him, in the midst of a group of village notables, prominent among whom was the Khateeb,[1] or spiritual chief, a keen-eyed hawk-nosed

[1] Literally preacher.

man of middle age, with a short black beard and snow-white turban. Indeed this was the universal head-dress, for all these were Okâls, or men initiated into the mysteries of their religion, and distinguished, by the spiritual rank which this conferred upon them, from the common herd. They wore *abbayehs* or flowing cloaks, with black and white stripes, beneath which, as they squatted cross-legged on the carpet, their bare feet appeared. They were a remarkably striking group of men, with generally handsome features of a somewhat Semitic caste, reserved and almost deferential to each other in manner, and with that quiet dignity and repose which characterises their bearing, especially on such occasions as the one which now called them together. It had been announced the night before that Sheikh Mohanna had a communication to make to the village notables; that it was one of some importance was assumed from the fact that a messenger had been sent off to summon a certain Sheikh Shibley from a neighbouring village, who was a member of the family of the deceased Sheikh Sâleh of Teraya. They were now awaiting his arrival,

not having as yet ventured to inquire the cause of their gathering, and indeed only from time to time exchanging a few words with each other in a low tone. As the initiated Druses never touch tobacco, there was not even the distraction of smoking to disturb the solemnity of the meeting. Suddenly a loud monotonous chant, followed by the rapid discharge of firearms, burst upon the silence, and was the signal for Sheikh Mohanna slowly to rise, for it announced the approach of his guest; and, followed by the notables, he advanced to the outer *meidan*, from whence could be seen approaching a group of thirty or forty young men, some carrying heavy-knobbed sticks, and others guns, which they fired from time to time, accompanying the process with a loud discordant singing. In rear of this small procession rode Sheikh Shibley, accompanied by four or five cavaliers. Many of the notables of Teraya now advanced to receive him, kissing his hand with great demonstrations of cordiality — a ceremony which he in his turn endeavoured to go through with Sheikh Mohanna, but which the latter resisted, thus giving rise to a polite

struggle, which is part of Druse etiquette, but which presents a somewhat comical appearance to the spectator, as any two of my readers may discover for themselves, if, with locked hands, each tries to be the first to kiss that of his friend. Like many other pieces of politeness, however, it is little more than a form, the superior in rank always making it a point to be vanquished in the struggle. On this occasion Sheikh Mohanna gracefully yielded; but among the retainers of the two sheikhs, where the rank was equal, the delicate point involved a more protracted effort.

Finally they all trooped back to the council chamber, Sheikh Shibley, after some more formal resistance, taking the seat to the right of his host, while his people all made a polite rush for the lowest seats, and were with difficulty persuaded to move up higher. Excepting the Japanese, there are no people more full of polite ceremony among themselves than the Druses. When at last they were seated, they again all formally saluted first Sheikh Mohanna, and then their village hosts, and coffee was brought in, from which all the more strict observers of their religion, however, ab-

stained; and complimentary speeches were interchanged, which lasted for about ten minutes.

Sheikh Mohanna then announced the fact that he had received a letter, stating that the late Sheikh Sâleh's daughter, who had for so many years been mourned as a victim of the massacre, had in fact been discovered by her mother, who, as they all knew, had gone in search of her, and that they were both expected to arrive that afternoon under the escort of a distinguished foreigner, well known in former years to the Sheikh, and highly respected and esteemed by him; that the occasion was one, therefore, which called for a reception in a style befitting so joyful an event, in which he now invited Sheikh Shibley, as a near relation of the family, to take part, and to remain as his guest for a few days. The latter accepted this invitation with a prettily turned little speech, and a grace of manner which would have been attractive, had it not been for an air of self-complacency which betrayed the good opinion which the speaker had of himself. Nor, it must be admitted, was it altogether without cause. He was a blue-eyed young man of four or five

and twenty, with a complexion so fair and features so Saxon, that, dressed by a London tailor, there would have been nothing to mark him as an Oriental. He was tall, muscular, and handsome, and an object of great admiration to Sheikh Mohanna's two sons on account of his proficiency in all manly exercises. He was a champion *jereed* player, and his skill in all feats of horsemanship had secured him a notoriety which had extended even to the Jebel Druse. He was a no less accomplished marksman with his rifle; and the fact that he had made several visits to Damascus, and had on one occasion spent some weeks at Beyrout, caused him to be regarded as a traveller and a man of the world, and to be much looked up to by the youth of the neighbouring villages. In addition to this, his family connection, as the son of the late Sheikh Sâleh's first cousin, was one which secured him a certain influence; for Sheikh Sâleh himself had been a man of such a remarkable force of character, and enjoyed such prestige as the head of one of the most ancient, as it had been one of the most powerful Druse families, that Sheikh Shibley, who was its next representative in

the male line, naturally occupied a position of some importance in the nation. He had of late years felt himself much aggrieved by what he considered a certain usurpation on the part of Sheikh Mohanna of his own rights and dignities; but during the lifetime of Sheikh Sâleh's widow, who, as a female Okâl herself, enjoyed high consideration, he had not dared to allow this sentiment to appear, more especially as Sheikh Mohanna was a man whom he had been taught to venerate from childhood, and of whom, in spite of himself, he stood in great awe. He comforted himself by the reflection, therefore, that the old man's death could not be long delayed, and he had no fear of his power to brush away from his path the two sons of the Sheikh, if they attempted to stand in it. An entirely new set of considerations, however, were imported into the question by the resurrection from the dead, among whom he had always numbered her, of Amina. A thousand inquiries sprang to his lips while he was expressing the delight, which he was far from feeling, at the intelligence to which he was listening. But one of the earliest lessons which a Druse is taught is

not merely to conceal his thoughts, but to convey the impression that they are the opposite of what they really are; and in this art Sheikh Shibley was an adept. A repast was now brought in upon a low round table standing about six inches from the ground, in the centre of which was a huge pile of rice, while round it were arranged dishes containing stews of mutton and of chicken, *leben* or sour goats' milk, eggs fried in oil, vegetable-marrow stuffed with spiced rice and mincemeat, sweet dishes made of flour and honey, and pistachio-nuts and other dainties. Round this gathered Sheikh Mohanna and his guest and sons, with the Khateeb and two or three others whose rank entitled them to the honour, while the others grouped round a second table, the remains of both being finally consumed by the retainers. Then all busied themselves with preparations for the start, for the hour was now drawing near when the travellers were approaching their destination. Sheikhs Mohanna and Shibley mounted pure-blooded Arabs, handsomely caparisoned with scarlet and gold, and rode out of the village accompanied by thirty or forty horsemen, some of whom carried spears,

and others guns, and preceded by a crowd of youths firing and singing, while the women screamed their applause in loud ululations, and having received news of the anticipated event, proceeded to deck themselves in their most gorgeous array. After a ride of an hour the party reached a high level plateau, the margin of which commanded an extensive view, and here they halted and dismounted. Young Kassim, who remained on the watch, shouted that he saw a cavalcade approaching. In a moment every saddle was filled, and as the travellers appeared above the crest of the hill, they were unexpectedly greeted by a *feu-de-joie*, in the midst of which Sheikh Mohanna, followed by his two sons and Sheikh Shibley, rode forward to meet them.

"Peace be upon you, oh friend of happy years gone by!" said Sheikh Mohanna, riding up to the leading horseman, and speaking in a voice trembling with emotion; "is it indeed you whom a merciful God has sent to lighten the gloom of my declining years with your valued presence? And has He indeed chosen you to be the saviour of our house by bringing back to us its most cherished members?"

"And upon you the peace, oh my ancient friend; of a truth, the pleasure which it gives me once more to see one whom I had so long mourned as numbered among the dead, is indeed enhanced by the fact I am the means of restoring to him his sister and his niece," replied Girius Bey, who, as the reader will doubtless have divined, was none other than Santalba. Meantime Sada, seated upon a mule astride a bundle of pillows, had ridden up, and after exchanging an affectionate greeting with her brother, presented to his wondering gaze a lovely girl, whose riding-habit was as strange a sight to Druse eyes as the side-saddle on which she was seated. Although the Druse women in this part of the country are less particular about concealing their faces than those in the Lebanon, Amina's veil, through which her beautiful features were plainly visible, was too transparent to satisfy even these less rigid requirements, and Shibley fancied he perceived a shade of disappointment mingled with the warmth of her uncle's salutation, as he welcomed to her ancestral home the female representative of the ancient house of Zedaan. As for the young sheikh

himself, while his greeting of his cousin was cold and reserved, as etiquette demanded, there was in her manner a quiet dignity and self-possession by which, while he was dazzled by her beauty, he felt somewhat overawed—a sensation which caused him some annoyance, as he had never been conscious of experiencing it in the presence of a woman before. He had no time, however, to analyse his feelings further; for, challenged by Kassim to a mock *jereed* combat, he was soon flying across the plateau in chase of the young horseman, his example being immediately followed by all the rest of the male members of the cavalcade, who sought to rival each other in the skill with which, when going at full speed, they could wheel their horses round on their haunches, and go off in the opposite direction, avoiding the blows aimed at them, and dexterously exchanging flight for pursuit as occasion offered.

As they approached the village the procession of footmen formed anew, the constant firing of guns was accompanied by loud chanting, with which mingled in the distance the shrill *zalhoot*, or joy-cry of the women, clus-

tered on the house-tops in gay holiday attire, their bright robes of scarlet, blue, and yellow gleaming amid the foliage of the orange and pomegranate groves. As the travellers entered the narrow streets the whole female population rushed into them with a loud chorus of welcome, scattering flowers, pouring on the ground libations of coffee, and pressing forward to kiss the hands, and even the dresses, of their long absent kinswomen ; for, as among the Highland clans, there were few, even of the poorest, who could not claim a blood relationship, however distant, with the family of their chief. All these sights and sounds were almost as strange to Amina as if she had really been—what to outward appearance she seemed —a foreign tourist. It is true she had spent many of the earlier years of her life in Damascus, but she had no recollection of her own people, nor of their manners and customs ; nor, though she had occasionally seen Druses in the streets of that great city, had she ever imagined that she herself belonged to the nation. The reflection was one which, amid her present surroundings, was calculated to give rise to a conflict of emotions. She

listened to the din of these noisy salutations as one in a dream, while her mind reverted to the sweet silence of those secluded walks at The Turrets, where, one short month since, with Reginald Clareville by her side, her imagination had pictured a possible future so unlike that which now seemed in store for her; and she marvelled at the strange fate which had linked in so mysterious a manner the destinies of two persons thus widely severed by birth and association. Though, during those last few days in London, they had talked over the change which had thus entered into her life, she had never realised its full extent till now; and though Reginald had repeatedly assured her that he felt that the tie which bound them together was too internal in its character for any outward circumstances to affect, she now perceived how much greater that change would be to him. Still she did not for a moment regret the decision at which they had both felt impelled to arrive. The strange experiences through which these two young people had passed, placed them outside the region of ordinary courtship. They knew too well what their natural inclinations were, even

to allude to them. It was not desire, but duty, which they had pledged themselves should ever remain uppermost. And they felt that to be false to their purest conception of God's will with regard to their mutual relation would be to be false to each other. To cherish even selfish hopes for the future would be to weaken their allegiance to the present. They refused, therefore, to indulge in anticipations of a union which it might not enter into His design should ever be consummated. And when Reginald, on the day before they parted, told Amina that he had become aware, after a severe struggle, that services were required of him which were paramount to all the claims of natural affection, it was then that he seemed to her most worthy of the love she had given him, and that she had felt the most irrevocably attached to him. Thus had he saved her the pain, which till then she feared she might cause him, of a similar confession; for to her it was already clear that the immediate duty demanded of her was to her family and her race—a duty which she must accomplish alone.

The struggle of the decision had, if possible, been rendered more acute, from the fact that

the day before her departure from London, she had witnessed with Reginald the marriage of Sebastian and Florence; a ceremony which Charles Hartwright had expedited to avoid further mishaps, immediately on his obtaining the release of his nephew from the asylum. Indeed, during these last few days in England, events had crowded so thick and fast upon her, that she had scarcely even yet been able to render an account of them to herself. The revelation of Masollam's perfidy; the terrible disillusion which it entailed; the disclosure of her own birth and parentage; the bursting upon her consciousness, in the midst of this pressure, of a love so passionate that it threatened to sweep all other considerations away before it; her first meeting with her mother, and her midnight flight with two, beings of whose existence a few short weeks before she had been ignorant, but who had now become more to her than all else beside. All this had been followed by the sudden appearance of Santalba, Charles Hartwright, and Florence in the little family hotel in London where she and her mother had been deposited by Clareville, with the strange story

of that crisis conflict between Santalba and Masollam, which resulted in Sebastian's incarceration in a lunatic asylum, and in Florence's illness. She had then been called upon to co-operate in its *dénouement*, to forget herself in her ministrations to Florence, and to recognise that the divine call was equally obeyed in that union she was assisting, as in the separation which she was now painfully anticipating—from him she loved. In the conflict of emotion induced by these events, there were times when the strain seemed more than she could bear; but as those who never refuse to bear the burdens which are laid upon them are never allowed to be borne down under them, she was conscious that a divine support was granted to her through a human instrumentality, and at such moments she leant, with a trust that never wavered, on the ever-ready arm of Santalba, whose tender strength seemed charged with an inspiration that imparted new vigour to her fainting frame.

Thus had she been able at last to nerve herself for her parting with those friends whose trials and whose fortunes she had shared, and above all, with him who was now to enter

alone on the tests and ordeals which should prove him worthy of his high calling, and of her own devotion; and, under the escort of the Count, to undertake that journey with her mother, which, as we have seen, was to terminate in the secluded Druse village of Teraya. But even now, as her ears were stunned with acclamations of welcome, and her eyes ranged over the motley and excited crowd, until they finally rested on the majestic countenance of her uncle and the handsome figure of her cousin, she felt the dread stealing over her of the isolation amid such strange surroundings as were in store for her, when he who had been her guardian and protector should leave her to meet alone the new problems of her life, with its rude and unfamiliar conditions. There was a dread ever present with her, moreover, which appalled her even more than the life of a Druse woman in a Druse village—the spectre, which seemed to haunt her dreams whether waking or sleeping, of a venerable man, beneath whose wise and saintly exterior there lurked the passions and the power of a demon. The Masollams had made no outward sign, since

her flight; but their very silence was terrifying, the more especially taken in conjunction with the extreme sensibility which her organism yet retained to the contact of those influences, which her close and protracted internal association with them enabled them still to project upon its finer surfaces. Thus there were times when she was unable to banish the sight of the Masollams from her inner vision: she was as conscious of their presence with her, and of their occupations, as if they had been actually visible in the flesh; but as these images could not be relied on as conveying any real information, she combated representations of this description upon her mental retina by methods not known to the faculty when called upon to treat patients who are suffering from what they term hallucination. In like manner she was exposed to hearing protestations which revolted her, from the hoary hypocrite from whose clutches she had escaped, sounding like a far-off echo, and making hideous music in her ears, even calling her back to him; now with honeyed words, now with foul abuse, until, invoking a higher potency of sound—which, until men understand more of the subtler principles of acoustics than they do now, it is

impossible to define—she sent these echoes rolling back upon themselves, till they appeared to die away in the distance,—a phenomenon which some account for by what they call "telepathy," and others by what they call the "astral current," and others, again—a very credulous and easily satisfied class indeed—by what they call "a trick of the imagination."

And so it happened that evening, when the maidens of Teraya in gay attire grouped themselves in circles on the *meidan*, by the light of the moon, and danced in stately measure round one of their number, who, holding a scarf in each of her hands, gracefully waved them overhead in time to the music, Amina saw them not; and when the men, forming in line, and clutching each other by their waistbands, lifted up their voices in uproarious and discordant chant, swaying their bodies and keeping time with their feet, while one flourished up and down the line, brandishing a drawn sword, and drums and reed pipes kept up a stunning accompaniment of noise, Amina heard them not.

"My child," said Santalba, who was standing by her side, watching the pained and dis-

traught expression on her face, and who well knew its cause, "you fear to be left alone here, and dread these visitations when I am no longer near you to help you to drive them away; but I have brought you here that you might be delivered, and I perceive that your deliverance is at hand. Retire to rest now, for I have that to say to your uncle still this evening which is of the utmost importance, and, as you may be needed before the night is spent, and must be fatigued with your journey, do not lose the precious moments. And now, old friend," he said, turning to Sheikh Mohanna, after Amina had retired, "dismiss your merry-makers. I have things to say to you which can only be talked about in the silent watches, when disturbing causes are at rest. It will recall those old times when we discussed the deeper mysteries—since which, doubtless, you have progressed in knowledge, and I long to have the benefit of your wisdom and experience."

So saying, Santalba slipped his arm into that of the old sheikh, who, after giving the necessary orders, disappeared with his guest out of the bright moonlight into the privacy of his inner apartments.

CHAPTER III.

SHEIKH MOHANNA RELATES HIS EXPERIENCES OF THE OCCULT.

THE devotion of Santalba during the early years of his life to oriental studies, and the opportunities afforded by his residence in the East, had enabled him to master the intricacies of the Arabic language to a degree rare among foreigners, and not common even among the Arabs themselves. He was thus able to converse on the most abstruse subjects of metaphysics with an ease and fluency which rendered his society peculiarly acceptable to a man of such broad and liberal views, and so highly gifted intellectually, as Sheikh Mohanna. As the old man sank down upon the cushions of his divan, motioning his guest into a comfortable corner, he heaved a long-drawn sigh,

which seemed to express a sense of relief and of contentment.

"I have indeed much to hear from you, O friend of my soul!" said the sheikh, lifting his hand with a solemn and impressive gesture, "and much to say to you; but it is right and fitting that, before beginning our conversation, we quicken within us the Divine Presence by a few moments of internal concentration."

At the expiration of about ten minutes, during which the two men remained with closed eyes, and in an attitude so motionless that even respiration seemed for the time suspended, the sheikh resumed—

"I feel moved to acknowledge openly in your presence that, since we last met, now nearly twenty-five years ago, I have at times yielded to doubts of my own higher inspirations—in other words, I doubted God. I did so, not I trust from any desire to escape responsibility, but because my internal perceptions became confused, by reason of a conflict between the gifts and faculties which have been intrusted to me. You are aware that these gifts, and the remarkable power which

I exercised through them in the healing of disease, the foretelling of future events, and the influencing of individuals sympathetically or antipathetically towards each other, were being developed in me to a very marked degree when we parted, as they were frequently a subject of earnest discussion, and even of experiment between us. For many years my power continued to increase. I was finally introduced into the society of beings not visible to the natural human eye, and maintained a daily and almost hourly intercourse with them, and, as I had reason to believe, the power which they exercised through me was the means of enabling me to effect much good both physically and morally among those of my nation who applied to me for medical or spiritual advice.[1] Then arrived a period

[1] That the character of Sheikh Mohanna is not altogether an imaginary one, may be gathered from the following extract from the late Colonel Churchill's work on the Lebanon :—

"Sheikh Bechir is one of the best-informed Druse sheikhs, and has acquired a store of history and literature which makes his conversation in every way superior. He has for some years devoted his time, singular as it may appear, to the cultivation of magic; and the stories he relates of his interviews with immaterial beings are novel and startling. At times he will place a jug between the hands of two persons sitting

during times of fasting and abstinence when a new and more powerful light seemed to burst in upon me, revealing, as it were, traps

opposite to each other, when, after the recital of certain passages taken indiscriminately from the Koran and the Psalms of David, it will move spontaneously round, to the astonishment of the holders. A stick at his bidding will proceed unaided from one end of a room to the other. A New Testament, suspended to a key by a piece of string, will in the same way turn violently round of itself. On two earthenware jars being placed in opposite corners of a room, one being empty, the other filled with water, the empty jar will, on the recital of certain passages, move across the room; the jar full of water will rise of itself on the approach of its companion, and empty its contents into it, the latter returning to its place in the same manner that it came. An egg boiling in the saucepan will be seen to spring suddenly out of the water, and be carried to a considerable distance. A double-locked door will unlock itself. There cannot be a doubt that an unseen influence of some kind is called into operation, but of what nature those may conjecture who like to speculate upon such matters.

"But it is in the more serious cases of disease or lunacy that his supernaturally derived powers are called into play. Previous to undertaking a cure, he shuts himself up in a darkened room, and devotes his time to prayer and fasting. Fifteen and sometimes thirty days are passed in this state of abstinence and self-denial. At last one of the genii, described by him to be much of the same appearance as human beings, will suddenly appear before him and demand his bidding. He then states his position, and requires assistance in the case he is about to undertake. The genii replies at once that his request is granted, and encourages him to proceed.

"The wife of Sheikh Achmet Talhook had been for more than two years afflicted with a swelling, which had been long

and pitfalls, and the heat and radiance of it were so great that the invisible beings were unable to support it, for the light which suited them

mistaken for pregnancy. Sheikh Bechir, after the usual preparatory discipline, passed his hand over her person, and in five minutes she arose perfectly cured. Sheikh Yusuf Talhook was brought before him a confirmed lunatic; in two days he returned to his home perfectly restored in health and reason.

"That the sheikh maintains his intercourse with spiritual agents to be real and effective is unquestionable; and, indeed, the belief in magic, and in the interposition of an order of unseen creatures in worldly affairs, at the bidding of those who choose to devote themselves earnestly to such intercourse, is universal throughout the entire population of every religion and sect. There are Christian priests who affirm that the Psalms of David contain an extensive series of necromantic passages, which, if properly understood and properly treated, would place the world of spirits at man's disposal, and invest them through their medium with miraculous powers. Instances could be multiplied in which the most extraordinary and unaccountable results have been brought about by the intervention of individuals, who make this communion the subject of their study and contemplation. But as the ears of Europeans could only be shocked by assertions and statements which they would not fail of holding to be utterly fabulous and ridiculous, the subject is merely alluded to in these pages to indicate the existence of a very prominent and prevalent belief in the Lebanon."—Mount Lebanon: A Ten Years' Residence, from 1842 to 1852, by Colonel Churchill, Staff Officer of the British Expedition to Syria; vol. i. p. 164. Saunders and Otley: 1853.

It is worthy of notice that the experiences of Sheikh Bechir were prior to any manifestations in England of a more or less similar character.

best was a dim and uncertain twilight—and this I could ensure by resisting, with all my power of will, the ingress of this brighter effulgence. Nevertheless, whenever I obeyed the impulse to make this effort, for the sake of regaining the communion from which it debarred me, I became conscious of a certain sense of sacrilege, and of a voice scarcely audible to my internal sense of hearing, which warned me against certain dangers incidental to the exercise of power under these conditions. And now there took place within me a conflict of a most painful character. If I listened to this voice, which seemed to be the voice of God speaking to me from out of the depths of my own nature; if I invoked the light, which seemed to be the brightness of His glory illuminating my very being,—then farewell to my visitants from the unseen world, and with them farewell to those gifts which I owed to their presence and their potency. No more could I bend the wills of my fellow-creatures to mine, and attract them to, or repel them from, one another. No more did I receive those bright rays of inspiration in which, as in a mirror, I caught glimpses of

the future; no more could I bid the sick to rise, and restore the insane to reason. As I had no other desire in seeking these powers but to exercise them for divine ends, could it be possible that I was mistaken in thinking that deep internal voice, so faint and low as to be barely audible, was the voice of God? Might not the glow which banished the ministrant beings be in fact the fiery ray of a nether region, which simulated the divine effulgence for the purpose of deceiving me, by revealing dangers which did not exist, and thus paralyse my power for good? O foolish theologians of all religions!" burst out the sheikh, breaking suddenly into the thread of his confession with fervent apostrophe,—"ye who patter so glibly about the inspiration of your sacred books, if you had ever sought the highest inspiration yourselves, you would know how difficult it is to tell the true from the false. You who have no doubts, did it never occur to you that the inspired writers themselves had reason occasionally to doubt exceedingly? that the more sincere they were, the more devoted as receptacles of the divine afflatus, the more subtle were the temptations,

the more insidious the devices, of those infernal influences which seek to mislead and to confuse that poor human faculty which is the only channel through which all revelation, of whatsoever kind, can be conveyed to man? that each erring mortal has nothing but his own finite faculties wherewith to judge whether the inspiration he receives is divine or not? If he be honest, the first discovery he makes in the searching analysis upon which he enters with regard to the revelations that flood his soul, is that they are conditioned upon his own moral state,—that it is no more possible for an absolutely pure revelation to issue from a mortal in which a taint of impurity exists, than for clean water to stream through a dirty pipe; and as no human beings are untainted with impurity, and as all are finite, they can under no circumstances become the media for infinite truth in its infinite and unsullied purity. The next discovery that he makes is that, owing to his limited and imperfect faculty, he is unable at times to distinguish between the truth and the simulation of it, presented to him in specious guise by an agency which has been so active in the

propagation of error in all religions, that the rival inspirations thus given to man have been the cause of more wars, of more crime, and of more infidelity, than the passions, cupidities, and lusts of men themselves. Hence it happens that the amount of the divineness in the inspiration must ever be dependent on the amount of divineness in the inspired man. And it needs as much inspiration in the reader to judge what is divine in an inspiration as in the writer of it; for in one sense no man can either write, or speak, or think, except under inspiration of some sort. That inspiration may be true to the full extent that man, as at present constituted, can bear truth, and yet that it should differ in the mode of its presentation, is certain. That an inspiration may be so remarkable in its presentation as to create the impression that it is a divine revelation, and yet be in all essentials false, is also certain; and it is because I feel that I have yet much to learn in regard to the methods of discrimination and analysis, that I have felt impelled to narrate to you my own experiences and the struggles they involved, in the hope, my friend, that your own investi-

gations into this, the most important of all the questions which affect the moral condition and destiny of man, will enable me to arrive at more distinct conclusions than I have hitherto been able to do."

Santalba remained for some moments in deep and concentrated thought.

"I must know more," he said at length; "you have not told me all. There is a darker cloud behind, about which you have been silent."

As he spoke, the frame of the sheikh became spasmodically convulsed; the veins in his forehead and temples swelled, his jaws became fixed, his hands clenched themselves involuntarily, and all his muscles stiffened. Santalba sprang to his feet, and laid his hand on the old man's head, every fibre of his form quivering under the impulse of that intense concentration of volition, which, by means of physical touch, he was projecting in a current of vital energy into the organism of his friend. Gradually the tension relaxed, the locked teeth parted, the clenched fingers loosened, the glazed and staring eyes resumed their natural

expression, and a long deep breath announced the termination of the struggle.

"You see now why I dared not break the silence; I knew I was not strong enough to venture on that fearful ground alone, and I did not know your power. I thank God who sent you to release me, for unaided I could never have achieved deliverance. Yes; it is true that in the conflict of doubt and difficulty to which I have alluded, I came under the spell of other and more potent influences than that of those gross and superficial beings whose co-operation in my healing and other efforts I have just described. In a fatal moment I fell back upon the arcana of our own Druse religion — those more deeply hidden mysteries with which but few even among our own initiated are conversant, but which, thanks to the early training of our old friend Masollam in India, to his subsequent investigation of existing forms of Asiatic mysticism, to your researches into the occult records of the past, and to my familiarity with the esoteric side of my own religion, we were enabled to systematise; until at one time it seemed as

though we should be able to use the hidden wisdom of the ancients as the foundation of a faith which should meet the wants of the age,—a project which had a peculiar attraction to me, for it must have resulted in that apotheosis of the Druse religion, which has in fact been the repository of occult knowledge ever since the days of Hamzé,[1] who intrusted the key of it to the safe keeping of the faithful."

"They are at this moment fascinating the gaze of an ignorant and gaping public, my friend," said Santalba, with a smile; "those mysteries which Hamzé got from the Magians and the Sabians, which they received from the Buddhists and the disciples of Zoroaster, and which they had in turn derived from still more ancient religions, are being popularised for the benefit of the most civilised, and therefore the most corrupt, society which at this moment exists upon the face of the earth, with the desire, no doubt sincere on the part of those who have given themselves to this task, that it may do it good.

[1] Hamzé is the great prophet of the Druses, to whom was committed the revelation of the mysteries of their religion.

In fact they have adopted our old idea, and hope to make it the basis of a future religion, believing that the time has come when an enlightened public may be intrusted with occult knowledge. You remember that for a short time we entertained a similar hope, and you remember why we abandoned it. You remember that we discovered that, from the Zend-Avesta and the books of Moses down to the Koran, there were no sacred books to which varied and conflicting concealed interpretations had not been given, over which the mystics had not themselves contended, and that no mystical interpretation of any of them propounded one practical solution for the world's misery and its needs. They quarrel over where we come from, and what we are made of, and where we go to—these mystics —but which of them solves the social riddle? which of them deals with the practical questions affecting the daily lives and happiness of men,—with the great problem of labour and capital, for instance, with the economic question, or with the sex question, with the relation of man to man, and the relation of man to woman,—which are the burning questions for

society? Men have been useful in the world as moral reformers, just in the degree in which they were not mystics. What mysticism was there about Christ's teaching? No doubt men would be glad to take refuge in a concealed interpretation of his moral axioms, for they refuse altogether to practise the open and simple one. But we were in search of solutions, not riddles; of the facts of nature, not of hidden dogmas in regard to it; of truth which is to be found in the practice of what is good, not of truth which is revealed in a trance, the verification of which is impossible. In a word, we were in search of light, not darkness; and as the more profoundly we became immersed in mysticism, the blacker grew the darkness, we turned our backs upon it, and came out into the light. Was not that so?"

"It was indeed; but, in the conflict I was describing, I once more fatuously turned to the old quarter for light, and stumbled into a pit as black as night. Dissatisfied at last with the ignorance, frivolity, and shallowness of many of the invisible beings I have already alluded to with whom I came into contact,

and finding to my dismay that those of a higher class whom I at first met were leaving me, while others of a lower class were increasing in overwhelming numbers, and that my failures in healing were more frequent and my powers declining, and yet not having strength of purpose to follow at once the still small voice I seemed to hear, I invoked the forces of that profounder magic known to the mystics, as I had done with comparative success in those early days of our experiments; but ah, how different now were the results! Then my powers of will were unimpaired, and I could, under great pressure, still retain control of my faculties. Now, weakened by the contact I had been having with inferior beings, I was swept out of myself by unseen influences into unknown regions: for days I remained in trances, until at last I became conscious that I was enslaved. It is true that during these periods I was lifted into conditions of supreme exaltation—that I lived in a world in which the senses were gratified, and in which knowledge abounded—that I received marvellous inspirations; but I was deprived of the verifying faculty. I could not tell what was real

and what was phantasmal, what was true and what was false. Impressions succeeded impressions, until at last my real existence seemed merged in that of one who was not of this world; and when I returned to outer consciousness, though I ate and drank and went through all the routine of daily life, I did it as one in a dream. I knew then that I was taken possession of. Fortunately the possessing influence acted through me in a manner which did not give rise to suspicion as to my sanity; but I lived in constant dread that under its impulse I should be made to act insanely. So far from such being the case, my reputation for wisdom and sanctity increased; and I became the author of a treatise which contains the hidden meaning of the first book of Hamzé, which had never before been revealed. I was compelled to summon a meeting of the Uwahid, a grade, as you know, superior to the Okâls, and to whom is confided the more interior Taweel, or interpretations, to whom I communicated it in secrecy. Its tendency was to destroy the dogma of the existence of celestial beings, of their ministering function to man on earth, and of the existence of a God.

The marvellous skill with which this interpretation was constructed, in the exactly opposite sense in many instances to the outward meaning of the words, yet retaining throughout their correspondential signification, was so great that I did not wonder at my audience being transfixed with amazement at a production so far transcending any human power of composition, and accepting it as absolute truth. My God!" exclaimed Sheikh Mohanna, interrupting himself, while the drops of perspiration stood on his forehead at the bare recollection of his suffering, "what a moment of agony that was! Have you ever dreamt in a nightmare that you were in your coffin, about to be buried alive, and that you were unable to call out or make any sign of life? If you have, you can form some notion of the effort I made to break the spell which paralysed my faculties when I saw my beloved friends accepting from my lips a revelation of deepest hidden truth, which I knew to be a lie. You ask me how I knew it. Because my underlying consciousness was still awake. I knew that I was speaking from a surface consciousness which I could not control, because

it was controlled by another, who stifled every attempt I made to give utterance to the voice which whispered within. Oh, my friend, think of the agony I have endured, and am daily enduring, when I think how that lie is spreading! That I, who sought but to elevate and purify the faith of my nation, should be the means of giving to it, in the guise of occult science, a production so skilfully worded as to deceive, as it were, the very elect; and that, like some foul miasma, it is spreading silently and secretly, contaminating with its touch the best and noblest seekers after truth, and poisoning with its atheistic virus the choicest spirits of my people. I dared too much. I strove to force my way into regions which are locked and guarded; I turned a deaf ear to the voice of my Lord and Master; I quenched His Spirit, and He has laid His hand heavily upon me."

At this point the voice of the speaker sank so low as to be barely audible, and as he murmured the last words, he shivered slightly, and stretched out his hand to Santalba, whose responsive grasp seemed to give him a new accession of power. "And yet," he resumed,

"my Lord did not leave me comfortless. Oh, what internal resistance I have to overcome to tell you what follows! Reinforce me, my friend; invoke the mighty agency you serve to come to our support, for all the powers of darkness are combined against me, to stifle my utterance. When," he continued, "I had sufficiently woven the web of mystical delusion round my hearers to satisfy my infernal master, he left me comparatively at peace. I still walked as one in a dream, I still knew I was not free; but I rested—rested with a horrid dread that worse was to follow. I was watching one night in the depth of my despair, resisting sleep, because I feared it might lapse into trance, and I had begun to conceive a horror of all conditions in which my senses were not on the alert, when suddenly I became aware of the bright light which had never visited me since I had invited the gloom of mysticism. It was such a light as arrested Paul on his way to Damascus. And I prostrated myself before it; and I felt a slight touch, and heard a voice saying, 'Look up, for your deliverance draweth nigh;' and I looked up, and beheld a figure of radiant loveliness, the

effulgence of which was so dazzling that I could scarcely bear it, and the form was that of a woman, and I was inwardly prompted to inquire as to her nature, and I was answered by internal perception, according to the dogmas of my own religion ; for, as you may remember, we believe that the Deity is in His own essence Light, from which emanated the male principle, which we call the 'Universal Mind' or Intelligence, and the female principle, which we call the 'Universal Soul,' and which latter, conceiving by the action of the 'Universal Mind,' brought forth the 'Eternal Word'; and I now perceived, what has been hidden from the faithful till now, that the 'Eternal Word' was twofold, masculine and feminine, and the feminine principle was shown to me that I might understand this, and I was further made aware that my apprehension of this truth would constitute my deliverance; and as I pondered thus, the figure placed her finger on her lips, and seemed to melt into the brilliancy of the light which blinded me, so that I was compelled to close my eyes, and when I opened them again, the light had vanished. But I buried these things in my

heart, and when I compared this vision with my first experience of intercourse with the gross and superficial beings in the unseen world, who had helped me to work wonders and perform acts of healing, and with my second experience of those more profounder and subtler intelligences of a more nether sphere, who delude men with the specious phraseology of occult science, and seek to draw them away from the practice of true religion, by the substitution for it of esoteric dogmas, I was able to perceive the difference between the true and false; but I also perceived that the distinction was one which it was impossible to describe, and which could be apprehended only by experience; and that as my people were not yet ready to receive this truth, I must be silent in regard to it, and that the gesture in the vision had been to warn me of this; but I derived comfort from the thought, that though I was still in bondage, and had been used as a medium for propagating error, it might still be reserved to me to be the means of communicating a truth which should not merely be the antidote of error among a small and obscure nation, but a great and saving message